

THE OLD FIRM

F. MORTON HOWARD



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THE OLD FIRM

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BY

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"HAPPY RASCALS," "STRICTLY BUSINESS," ETC.



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TO
WILLIAM PARTRIDGE CUBITT
OF BACTON ABBEY, IN THE COUNTY OF NORFOLK
IN RECOLLECTION OF SO MANY HAPPY DAYS
IN AND ON AND BY THE FRINGE OF
THE SEA

THE OLD FIRM



THE OLD FIRM

CHAPTER I

WITHIN the broad bow-window of a quayside tavern there stood a solitary figure that defiantly opposed its own darkling aura to the fresh and spacious brilliance of the day. With hands deep-plunged into pockets, with legs straddled doggedly apart, and with chin sunk on chest, Mr. Horace Dobb scowled out at the sunshine and formulated vague anathemas against a universe for whose saviour he had lost all relish.

"Aye, shine on!" growled Mr. Dobb, bitterly addressing the sun. "Little *you* care! *You* ain't tied up for life to a rotten little second-hand shop!"

And, by this apostrophe, Mr. Dobb dragged down the curtains of secret vexation which surrounded him, and stood revealed as one more monument to the elusiveness of human contentment.

For here was a man who, less than two short years ago, had achieved a coup that was the admiration of himself and the envy of his intimates.

Not everyone may hope to acquire a wife and an established business in one lucky stroke, but this, indeed, was the feat that Mr. Dobb had performed.

Domesticity and independence thus simultaneously attained, Mr. Dobb had gleefully resigned his berth as cook to that disreputable vessel, the "Jane Gladys,"

and had settled to a shore-abiding career in the fond belief that now, of a surety, had he won to a state of life which must completely satisfy him.

And belief ripened into confidence when, by the exercise of his peculiar talents for intrigue, Mr. Dobb arranged that his three closest cronies, time-welded companions of his on the "Jane Gladys," should likewise quit their seafaring existence and take up urban occupations near him in the ancient little harbour town of Shorehaven. In this manner a confederacy of happy rascality transferred its activities from shipboard to land, and not only were old friendships thus maintained unbroken, but their value was enhanced by increased scope of opportunity for petty, but profitable, commercial conspiracy.

Loudly, in the earlier days of this new regime had Mr. Horace Dobb proclaimed the existing conditions of his life to be just as he could wish them to be. This declaration, however, he came to making with less and less frequency and enthusiasm as the days grouped themselves into weeks, and the weeks tallied into months.

And now, before even the second anniversary of his double marriage to a spouse and a shop had come round, here he was no longer troubling to hide from himself that he had been mistaken in his notions of an ideal existence. . . .

Again Mr. Dobb fretfully addressed himself to the sun.

"Easy enough for *you* to shine!" he sneered. "*You* ain't got competition to contend with. If you 'ad rent and rates and taxes and——"

He stopped sharply, for the handle of the door had

begun to scroop. A tremor coursed through Mr. Dobb's squat frame, seeming to tauten and vivify it. In a moment he had become brisk and genial and on his guard.

Someone entered the room. Mr. Dobb, continuing to stare through the window, hummed a few lively bars, such as might advertise the natural gaiety of any prosperous business man who had not a single care in the world. Then he picked up his neglected meed of refreshment, sipped at it with noisy appreciation, and replaced the empty glass on the table with an airy turn of his wrist and an exuberant little bang.

This by-play concluded, Mr. Dobb turned with an engaging smile of friendliness towards the figure of the new-comer. Immediately and undisguisedly he relapsed into moroseness, for he saw the other man to be one Mr. Joseph Tridge, member of that old-established alliance to which allusion has already been made.

"'Orace," observed Mr. Tridge in singularly flat and ungratified tones.

"Joe," returned Mr. Dobb with equal lack of ardour.

Mr. Tridge, having plainly conceded to etiquette all that he intended, offered no further remark, but crossed to the window. Here he ranged himself beside Mr. Dobb and glowered out at the harbour in just the same misfavouring manner as marked his companion's regard of the scene. And thus the two remained for awhile, until at last Mr. Tridge, emitting a long, quivering breath, turned impatiently away and flung himself into a chair.

"Same 'ere with me," stated Mr. Dobb simply.

"Why the dooce I was ever fool enough to let you persuade me into settling down in this miserable, potty, cock-eyed, underdone little village, marooned on a

muddy, smelly old creek——” fulminated Mr. Tridge.

“Business bad?” sneered Mr. Dobb.

“Business ain’t bad,” returned Mr. Tridge. “No, nor business ain’t good. No, it ain’t medium ’alf-way, neither! And I’ll tell you for why! Because there ain’t no dam business at all! See?”

“What, don’t no one come to the Magnolia T’ilet Saloon now?” asked Mr. Dobb, clearly a little startled.

“Oh, there’s plenty *comes!* They comes for a bob’s worth of coppers, or to see if I can oblige ’em with a stamp, or to ask the way to the ’arbour. But as for decent, respectable folks as wants a ’air-cut or a shave or a bottle of brilliantine——”

“I must say I ain’t altogether surprised, Joe,” stated Mr. Dobb candidly. “Half the time you’re out, and three hours later you comes back to take down a notice on your door what says ‘Back in five minutes.’ ”

“Well, a man’s entitled to a certain amount of reckeryation, ain’t ’e?” sullenly contended Mr. Tridge.

“Ah, but being out such a lot puts you all behind, Joe. When you *do* happen to come back, you have to ’urry. And the customers you attends to in a ’urry don’t look a good advertisement for the Magnolia T’ilet Saloon when they leaves. They don’t look like customers at all: they look more like first-aid cases.”

“When you’ve done philosophizing,” sourly observed Mr. Tridge, “p’raps you’ll attend to your *own* business. If we’re going to talk about businesses let’s talk about yours, and leave mine alone.”

“Ah! but that’s just what you’re too fond of doing, Joe.”

“And what’s it got to do with you, in any case?” Mr. Tridge truculently returned. “It don’t matter to you, do it?”

"That's just where you're wrong, Joe. It do! Matter of fact, these last few minutes I've been doing a bit of thinking and——"

"Your thinkings generally lead to doings," remarked Mr. Tridge, with interest. "About time there was something doing too. Well, what's the idea? What 'ave you been thinking *this* time?"

He awaited Mr. Dobb's reply with marked expectancy, but that gentleman was displaying a strange hesitation.

"I could believe most things about you, 'Orace," frankly admitted Mr. Tridge; "but I could never believe as you're getting shy! Never! Come on, out with it!"

"Well then, Joe, old pal," said Mr. Dobb, "I was wondering whether you—whether you'd take me into partnership with you in your saloon? There!"

"'S'trewth, 'Orace, it ain't come to *that*, 'as it?" cried Mr. Tridge in amazement.

"It has, old chum," sorrowfully affirmed Mr. Dobb.

"Ah, it's part of some new dodge you've thought of?" suggested Mr. Tridge, recovering himself. "I thought at first you really meant it!"

"But I do mean it!" asseverated Mr. Dobb. "It ain't no part of a plan or a scheme or nothing, Joe, old shipmate. I won't 'ide the truth from you, Joe. Business is rotten with me—rotten and perished and gone all to dust!"

"I certainly 'ad a sneaking notion that things was going a bit slow with you. Why, it must be weeks since you and me and Peter Lock and old Sam Clark brought off a deal! But I never guessed it could ever be so bad as you'd want to come into partnership with *me*!"

"I'm too sharp and clever, Joe," sorrowfully ex-

plained Mr. Dobb. "And I've stayed in business in these parts too long now. I started off so well, too. I reckon pretty nigh everybody in Shore'aven has come to my shop at some time or other."

"Aye, *once*," laconically ceded Mr. Tridge.

"And now no one comes," complained Mr. Dobb. "They'd rather go and be cheated somewhere else. Not so much as a rusty set of fire-irons have I had offered to me for weeks past. Why, the missis 'as 'ad to take to stocking side-lines on 'er own to keep the place going at all. 'Ead-ache pills, shampoo powders, almenacks, and penny packets of needles—you know the sort of thing. Worst of it is, she makes more out of 'er side-lines than I do out of the shop. And that makes 'er a bit uppish."

"Ah, I'd noticed you'd give up smoking cigars on Sundays!" mentioned Mr. Tridge.

"I must say that woman has been a surprise and a disappointment to me," declared Mr. Dobb ungallantly. "It ain't a bit like you read about women in poetry. She ain't got at all the right idea of 'elping a man in 'is troubles. When things was going right with me she was all 'oney. *Now* she's all vinegar. Just because it happens to have been her premises to start with, she's took pretty well all the responsibility out of my 'ands lately, to say nothing of the key of the till."

"What was you thinking of, to let 'er?"

"Well, mostly, Joe," confided Mr. Dobb, "I was thinking it was a wonder where she found breath to say all the things she did. And it was no good trying to argue with her, because that only gave her the chance to go on talking. And do you know what it's come to now, Joe? One shilling per day, strictly excluding

Sundays—that's all she allows me! And she 'as the cheek to call that 'travelling expenses!' ”

“A bob a day? Why, that 'ardly allows you to travel to the nearest licensed 'ouse!” commented the scandalized Mr. Tridge.

“Of course it don't! But there *was* a time when I 'ad the free 'andling of the till, and, thank goodness, I 'ad the presence of mind to 'ide a bit away for a rainy day. But I can't stand a life like this much longer, Joe! Let 'er take over ~~the~~ whole of the mouldy old shop! I'll prove my independence by getting a job with someone else! And that's why I thought, if you'd take me into partnership in your saloon——”

“By all means!” cried Mr. Tridge, and laughed loudly, but quite mirthlessly. “Oh, anything to oblige a pal!”

“Ah, Joe, old chum, you and me always was the best of pals!” fawned Mr. Dobb. “We'll soon make a success again of the Magnolia T'ilet Saloon, see if we don't. And you can go out as much as you like. I'll attend to the business! When can I start with you?”

“To-morrow,” answered Mr. Tridge with a sort of savage jocosity. “Better start as soon as you can.”

“To-morrow it is!” joyously accepted Mr. Dobb.

“Aye, better start as soon as you can,” repeated Mr. Tridge, “because the partnership can only last four days, at the most!”

“Four days? What do you mean?”

“Why, I've sold the business!” announced Mr. Tridge. “And the new proprietor takes over next Monday!”

For a long, long space Mr. Dobb remained inert under this spiteful blow from Fate, and Mr. Tridge

enjoyed his discomfiture, as one dupe may find a certain rankling solace in contemplating the straits of another cozened victim.

"But—but—but what are *you* going to do, Joe?" asked Mr. Dobb at last.

"Blessed if I know! But it'll be anything but barbering in Shore'aven, you can take your oath of that!"

"But there's me, Joe," Mr. Dobb plaintively reminded him. "If that's your idea of being friendly, or even honest——! I looks to you to give me a 'elping 'and, and——"

"I am fed up with shaving, and I am fed up with 'air-cutting, and I am fed up with shampooing, and I am fed up with the smell of 'air-ile, and I am fed up with singeing, and I am fed up with Shore'aven," categorically stated Mr. Tridge. "And I am going to clear right out! And you could jolly well do the same, if you wanted to, couldn't you?"

There was a startled little exclamation from Mr. Dobb, and he blinked at Mr. Tridge as though he had found the remark so luminous that it dazzled him.

"Why, so I could, Joe!" he whispered. "So I could! I never thought of that! That shows you the effect of married life on the intellect, don't it?"

Like a man suddenly confronted with necessity to reconsider an entire plan of campaign, Mr. Dobb silently, as it were, retired with himself to a seat in the corner. Tipping his hat over his eyes to preclude outside distractions, he folded his arms, stretched forth his legs, and purposefully yielded himself to a wide-ranging meditation. Mr. Tridge, bringing forth a newspaper, began a calculative scrutiny of its racing columns, marking here and there an item with the stub of a pencil, and occasionally sending his finger-tips on

a tour among his square, wooden features, in effort to stimulate memory and judgment.

And so a close quiet prevailed in the apartment till again the door opened and a third individual entered.

Aged, if not exactly venerable, was the rubicund and whiskered countenance of this new arrival. His eyes were singularly clear and of an innocent blue, and the plumpness of his figure was proclaimed and emphasized by the tight woollen jersey he wore.

He came through the doorway with a kind of fuming impatience, muttering darkly to himself and shaking his head and frowning. At view of Mr. Tridge and Mr. Dobb, his ill-humour became clamorous and articulate.

"I won't 'ave it!" he declared. "I won't 'ave it! I ain't going to stand it no longer, nor I won't, neither! See?"

"'Ullo, Sam!" said Mr. Tridge, looking up from his disturbed hippological survey. "What's it all about? What's the matter?"

"Conversation lozenges!" viciously snapped Mr. Samuel Clark.

"Same to you, and many of 'em!" retorted Mr. Tridge at once, accepting Mr. Clark's reply as something new in the way of crude repartee.

"You know—they round, flat peppermint things, with words printed on 'em," Mr. Clark explained. "That's what I mean."

"Well, what about 'em?" asked Mr. Tridge warily.

"A danger and a noosance, that's what they are!" warmly declared Mr. Clark, and, diving his hand into his pocket, he produced three small discs. "'Ere, look at this," he requested, selecting one and passing it to Mr. Tridge. "What's it got printed on it, eh?"

"It says '*Pleased to meet you.*'"

"That's right. She give me that the first day. Now look at this. What's this one say?"

"It says '*Naughty boy,*' far as I can make out."

"That's right," again confirmed Mr. Clark. "The words is a bit faint because I 'appened to 'ave a touch of hindigestion and started sucking it. '*Naughty boy*'—that's it! She give me that one yesterday. Only the second time I'd met 'er! And now,"—Mr. Clark's voice soared to an indignant squeak—"now look at the one she give me this morning!"

"'*I love you,*'" read Mr. Tridge aloud.

"That's right! And I won't 'ave it, and that's flat! And so I shall tell 'er, too!"

"Tell who?"

"That Mrs. Brockway! Don't ask me 'oo she is," begged the stout old gentleman, heatedly, "because I don't know 'oo she is from Adam, except that she's been on my ferry-boat these three mornings running. Yes, and this morning she was asking me whether there was season tickets issued. A nice prospect that!"

"What's she like, Sam?" Mr. Tridge wanted to know. "'Andsome?"

"A face like a cottage loaf upside down, and a figger like a capital B!" supplied Mr. Clark.

"Well, then, if she's like that," commented Mr. Tridge, perplexed, "I can't see 'ow your friendship with 'er ever come to start."

"I tell you I ain't got no friendship with 'er!" disclaimed Mr. Clark. "First time she come on my ferry I was naturally polite and civil to 'er. And she took advantage of me being a—a bit chatty, and asked me if I liked sweets. And when she'd done giggling and tee-heeing at the answer I give 'er, she 'anded me that first

sweet I passed you. Picked it out, very careful, she did, from a big bag of 'em she'd bought somewheres."

"Why didn't you eat it?"

"Ah, that was where my civility run away with me sense," regretfully confessed Mr. Clark. "I told 'er larky-like, as I'd keep it as a keepsake of a pleasant meeting. That sort of thing. *You* know. It's a bit lonely on the ferry some mornings and—and one talks just for the sake of company."

Mr. Dobb, abandoning his cogitations, turned a torpid gaze of scorn upon the plump ferryman.

"Sam," he sepulchrally observed, "I always did say you was a gay old dawg!"

"I was simply being polite to encourage a noo customer," contended Mr. Clark with cold dignity, though none the less his complexion deepened a little. "I wanted 'er fares, I didn't want 'er sweets."

"You take my word for it, Sam," said Mr. Dobb, unconvinced, "marriage ain't half a lottery!"

"'Oo wants to get married?" cried Mr. Clark, evidencing alarm at mere mention of such a matter. "Not me! I only wants to be left to die in peace, at my age. When me time comes, of course, not before. But, if I can't 'ave that, I'd as soon chuck up my job and clear right out! Sooner, in fact! I've 'ad just about enough of Shore'aven, and that's the truth!"

Mutually did Mr. Tridge and Mr. Dobb turn towards each other to exchange looks that called attention to the strangeness of coincidence.

"We don't 'ave any of the jolly times ashore together that we used to 'ave," complained Mr. Clark. "And now this 'ere female is starting to worrit after me——! I ain't a vain man——"

"'Ow *could* you be?" murmured Mr. Tridge.

"But," continued Mr. Clark, proudly ignoring the interruption, "if that woman ain't trying to get 'er hooks into me as a 'usband, I'll eat my cap, peak and all! I've only met 'er three times, and each time strictly in the way of business, but, from the style she carries on, I 'ardly dare to think what might 'appen if I lost me presence of mind! One of them bold, masterful women," he sketched. "You know, wears a cape with beads on it, and takes a umbrella and a 'andbag everywhere with 'er. It's my firm belief she's a visitor what's come down to find a 'usband, and a 'usband she means to find by 'ook or crook. And it looks to me very much as if I'm the——"

Mr. Clark broke off, and wriggled his shoulders in angry distaste.

"You're losing your nerve, Sam," said Mr. Tridge compassionately. "Pull yourself together. You take and eat them there lollipops, instead of brooding over 'em. You eat 'em right up, and you'll 'ave destroyed all the evidence!"

"Why, so I shall! I never thought of that!" cried Mr. Clark, brightening visibly.

He held out the three lozenges in his wide palm for a few moments to stare at them in rather a challenging way. Then, shooting his hand to his open mouth, he impelled the sweets to a remote region within, where they caused him chokings and eye-waterings and other symptoms of acute discomfort. Eventually bringing the lozenges under closer control, he proceeded to crunch them with a relentless rapidity that was, however, slightly hindered in effectiveness by sundry dental deficiencies.

He was still sedulously masticating when once again the door opened, and now there sauntered in a young

man, trim in person, debonair in deportment, suave in pose. His gaze was frank and guileless, and the fresh complexion of his smooth-shaven face accorded pleasantly with the suggestion of candour and good humour conveyed by his general expression.

"Morning, Peter," greeted Mr. Tridge, and added at once, "what do you know?"

"'Morning, Joe," cheerily returned this Mr. Peter Lock. "'Morning, Sam! 'Morning, 'Orace! All four of us 'ere together, eh? Anything doing?" he asked, looking buoyantly from one to the other of his old ship-mates.

"Everything—and nothing," enigmatically returned Mr. Dobb. "If there ain't nothing doing with some of us before long, there'll be a lot doing."

"'Orace has got the dismals," explained Mr. Tridge. "Best leave 'im alone for a bit, Peter. You talk to *me*. Do you know anything good for this afternoon?"

Mr. Lock reflected for a moment and then shook his head.

"You know, Peter, I don't think you make the most of your chances as billiard marker at the 'Royal William,'" observed Mr. Tridge, quite severely. "With all them bookmakers and sporting chaps dropping in so often, you ought to learn a lot more than you do."

"Daresay," agreed Mr. Lock unconcernedly, and wandered to the wide invitation of the window, and stood there, peering out and whistling absently in a minor key.

"I believe you're keeping something back," said Mr. Tridge, watching him closely. "I believe you *do* know something!"

"I don't say as I don't," admitted Mr. Lock.

"Well, what *do* you know?" challenged Mr. Tridge.

"I know this," replied Mr. Lock, swinging round to face his friends, "that I've got the sack!"

"What?" simultaneously ejaculated Mr. Dobb and Mr. Tridge, while Mr. Clark was so surprised that he incontinently swallowed the last fragments of the lozenges, and was thus brought to a prolonged fit of coughing that greatly discounted the drama of Mr. Lock's announcement.

"I've got the sack," repeated Mr. Lock, waiting aloofly till Mr. Clark's discomfort was a mere matter of wheezings. "Got it swift and sudden. A week's wages in advance an——"

He concluded his sentence pantomimically, indicating expulsion with the toe of a boot.

"And simply for nothing!" he asserted. "Practically nothing, any way. Nothing he could prove, at all events."

"But what was it?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"Well, I was alone in the billiard-room, and the boss happened to sneak in without me seeing him," narrated Mr. Lock, speaking carefully. "And, just to amuse myself, I was practising some conjuring tricks. You know, sleight-of-hand, they calls it."

"With coins?" queried Mr. Dobb pointedly.

"As it happens, it was with coins. *My* coins, they were. I'll admit that the takings-box for billiards happened to be open, close by, at the time, but they were *my* coins."

"Bound to be," said Mr. Dobb ambiguously.

"The boss wouldn't give me a chance to explain. Oh, most ungentlemanly, he was! And—and—in the end, he give me a week's money and I—I left."

"Pity you didn't stick to card-tricks, Peter," murmured Mr. Clark, and Mr. Lock's responding glance

showed that he was divided in mind as to whether this was sympathy or innuendo.

"We four don't seem lucky, some'ow, do we?" said Mr. Dobb to Mr. Tridge, and that gentleman replied with a spreading gesture of his open palms, implying the fatalist's recognition of the superior strength of destiny.

"Oh, well, who the dickens cares, any way?" recklessly exclaimed Mr. Lock. "It's a blessing in disguise, really, me getting the sack is!"

"Pretty good disguise," commented Mr. Dobb.

"I'm sick and tired of Shore'aven, and I'm sorry I ever left the sea," stated Mr. Lock. "That's the place for happy doings—here to-day, and dodged off to some other port to-morrow! And it's back to the sea for me, boys! Back to the sea again, the very first chance I get!"

"And—and—and damned if I don't come with you!" asserted Mr. Tridge, with fervour.

"If you goes, I goes, too!" proclaimed Mr. Dobb, loudly and definitely.

"And leave me all alone 'ere by myself with that Mrs. Brockway?" bawled Mr. Clark in alarm. "That be blowed for a tale! If you chaps goes, I'm coming with you! And, if you ask me, the sooner we all goes the better."

Mr. Clark's words acted as a clarion call to rally the emotional disorder of the moment. There ensued a little pause, a wait electric with swift consideration and quick decisions.

The four men stood looking at each other, and through the minds of each of them flitted queer, unexpected little memories of care-free, sunlit hours long past, rough little vignettes of happy rascality and

diverting, inglorious adventure up and down all the harbour towns of England. . . .

And next, without another word being spoken, the four friends found that they had somehow come to a confused, eager hand-shaking and back-slapping with each other.

"That settles it, then!" shouted Mr. Dobb, in boisterous elation. "It's back to the sea for all of us, eh?"

"Oh, if only we could find the right kind of boat to suit us!" cried Mr. Tridge. "The four of us all together again——"

Mr. Dobb extended his arm and pointed up the harbour to where a mastless, time-battered hulk lay moored, with sinister significance, in close proximity to a ship-breaker's yard.

"If only *she* was sailing again," said Mr. Dobb wistfully. "If only the old 'Jane Gladys' was still herself, and not sold to a firewood and old-iron firm! If only us four were back again, snug and comfortable in her fo'c'sle!"

"'Eaven!" succinctly summed up Mr. Clark.

"And just about as likely—for *us*!" asserted Mr. Tridge sadly.

But Mr. Dobb, with a terrific frown weighing down his brow, had begun to pace the apartment; and at sight of this symptom his three companions nudged each other.

"Keep quiet, everybody!" commanded Mr. Clark. "'Orace 'as started thinking!"

A tense, strained hush followed while Mr. Dobb, under the eager surveillance of his friends, patrolled the room. Twice did he stop, as it were on a note of interrogative optimism; twice did he shake his head and

fretfully resume his perambulation. Then suddenly he halted.

"I got an idea," he announced. "I got to think it out a bit more first. But we'll all meet at the 'Jolly Sailors' after dinner, and talk things over quiet."

"Doings?" breathed Mr. Clark rapturously. "Oh, 'Orace, is it doings?"

"If things falls out right, the biggest doings we've ever 'ad!" promised Mr. Dobb.

"What is it, 'Orace?" supplicated Mr. Clark, palpitant with interest.

"Tell you later on."

"Oh, tell me now, 'Orace!" begged Mr. Clark. "I don't feel as I can wait. Tell me now. I don't want no dinner—not if there's doings a-coming."

"Well, I do want my dinner," returned Mr. Dobb, "and I'm going to 'ave it. But I'll tell you this much—I ain't so sure that we 'ave done with the old 'Jane Gladys' after all!"

And, refusing to be wooed to any further divulgence, Mr. Dobb took his leave of the company. He made his exit with a stiff-kneed stride, a slow swaying of the hips, his chin erect, and one hand thrust Napoleonicly into the opening of his waistcoat—a very figure of conscious dominance.

CHAPTER II

FOR the twentieth time within the past ten minutes Mr. Samuel Clark studied the clock on the mantelshelf of the "Jolly Sailors'" tap-room, and then, making querulous mumblings, shifted himself restlessly about in his chair.

It was manifest that a nervous anxiety possessed the stout ferryman. Indeed, his agitation had already found abundant expression in a heated altercation with another customer, who had responded humorously to a question of Mr. Clark's with regard to the accuracy of the clock's time-keeping. And this had led the landlord to take sides, making remark on the queerness of Mr. Clark in now imagining the clock so slow when it was always his custom at closing-time to complain noisily that this same clock was a good quarter of an hour fast.

Unfortunately, the landlord's partizanship had stung Mr. Clark to an impolitic irritation, and from the jagged peaks of this reckless mood he had assailed his opponents with such a storm of furious oratory that, in the end, the landlord falsely pretended a concern in his licence, and subjugated Mr. Clark by a stern order to depart forthwith.

Mr. Clark, at this decree, had at once been reduced to an abject and almost grovelling humility, professing utter contrition for what he had said, and vowing that he had not really meant a word of what he said, and yet, at the same time, confusedly arguing that he had not spoken without justification. And, eventually, the landlord had loftily accepted his apology, and the cus-

tomer had most exasperatingly warned Mr. Clark to be careful another time, and had gone off with a perkiness which had set Mr. Clark secretly yearning for the conjunction of darkness and a brick.

An hour back all this had happened, when Mr. Clark had already been in the tap-room ninety minutes, for he had come thither at the beginning of the dinner-hour equipped with a stack of ship's biscuits, and a look of determination. And, since the wordy disturbance, Mr. Clark had sat in a corner, fretting silently at the crawling drag of time, and the landlord had made a little habit of coming frequently to the bar to glance severely at Mr. Clark and then going away again without saying a word.

This was the situation when Mr. Joseph Tridge arrived, and Mr. Clark at once gave a little cry of joy, and almost hysterically insisted on paying for beer for Mr. Tridge to drink.

"I should never 'ave thought I could 'ave been so pleased to see you, Joe!" declared Mr. Clark. "I been sitting 'ere wondering sometimes if it wasn't all a dream what 'Orace said."

"It may be a dream yet," Mr. Tridge warned him in tones that were so unsprightly that Mr. Clark was at once moved to alarm.

"Oh, don't say that, Joe!" begged the stout ferryman. "If you knew 'ow set I am on the idea of going back to sea on the old 'Jane Gladys'——! Do you—do you think 'Orace will manage it?"

"I dunno," hesitated Mr. Tridge. "'Orace is——" He pursed his lips and shook his head dubiously.

"'Orace is 'Orace!" Mr. Clark loyally reminded him.

"Aye, there's that about it," agreed Mr. Tridge, more confidently. "'Orace is 'Orace!"

Mr. Lock, sauntering in, was just in time to catch the remark.

"Ah! and there's no one else quite like old 'Orace," he asserted.

There was a little wait while the three indulged in contemplation of the rare qualities of their friend and leader. A sunny smile broke out on Mr. Clark's face; Mr. Tridge shook his head in amusement at some reminiscence; Mr. Lock chuckled aloud in sudden recollection of one of Mr. Dobb's audacious achievements. And, while these wordless tributes were being paid to his powers, Mr. Dobb himself arrived opportunely on the scene.

He entered in a quick, business-like way, and Mr. Clark noted, with a thrill of increased hope, that Mr. Dobb was wearing his scarf-pin and rings, and had a flower in his buttonhole. In something of the style of a chairman who is about to preside over a company meeting where a big dividend will be declared, Mr. Dobb sate himself down at a table and his companions eagerly grouped their chairs about him.

"Well, 'ere we all are!" observed Mr. Dobb very pleasantly. "Now, the first thing is—who's got any money?"

At this familiar query, the brightness of the assembly was abruptly eclipsed. A moan of disappointment floated from Mr. Clark's lips, and even Mr. Lock's habitual sunniness could not prevent him from the comment of a bark of sarcastic mirth.

"Thought as much!" angrily declared Mr. Tridge. "That is about all 'Orace's great ideas ever comes to! Well, I'm paying for my own, and no one else's, so *that* settles *that*, far as I'm concerned. "'Oo's got any money?" " he mimicked in high disgust. "Bah!"

"When I say 'money'," continued Mr. Dobb imperturbably, "I means 'money.' I ain't alluding to a few stray coppers and a dirty little tanner or two. I mean *money*—big money. This ain't a swindle for drinks. This is fi-nance. See? And till I know 'oo's got any money worth mentioning, we can't get much further."

He gazed round him questioningly. Mr. Clark merely oscillated his head in wonderment at such hardihood. Mr. Tridge stared back at him defiantly, and made fierce mutterings in his throat. Mr. Lock, folding his arms, smiled dispassionately at the wall.

"We must 'ave capital!" postulated Mr. Dobb.

An entirely unsympathetic silence engulfed the statement.

"We want to form a signdikit," explained Mr. Dobb, a little desperately. "That's the idea."

Again there was silence, and then Mr. Tridge spoke in a markedly cold tone of voice.

"You got up a signdikit once before, 'Orace," he reminded him.

"Aye, so 'e did, when we was laying in Sharpness Docks," recalled Mr. Clark. "Got up a signdikit to buy a calf."

"That's it," confirmed Mr. Tridge. "'Orace collected the money off of us to pay for the calf, and the calf went and died."

"So he said," softly interpolated Mr. Lock.

"Died sudden, afore the rest of us 'ad even seen it," continued Mr. Tridge. "And the signdikit died sudden, too."

"I've told you a 'undred times," said Mr. Dobb patiently, "it 'ad to be destroyed under the foot-and-mouth disease. No one was more surprised than me when I went to fetch it aboard the night we sailed."

"No, 'Orace," observed Mr. Tridge, very definitely, "signdikits is off!"

"All right, then," readily returned Mr. Dobb, rising from his chair, "so am I!"

"'Ere, don't go like that, 'Orace!" cried Mr. Clark. "Tell us the idea, before you go, any way."

"Well, it starts with a signdikit, as I've told you," said Mr. Dobb, sitting down again at once and staring challengingly round him. "We all puts something into it."

"And *one* of us," darkly intimated Mr. Tridge, "takes it all out again."

"We shares the profits according to what we puts in," explained Mr. Dobb.

"What profits?" sceptically asked Mr. Tridge.

"The profits we earn as a signdikit, of course!"

"But 'ow do we earn 'em?" persisted Mr. Tridge.

Mr. Dobb leaned forward across the table on folded arms, and the look on his face was that of a card-player about to put down an irresistible trump.

"Well," he drawled, "'ow does 'Orace & Co., ship-owners, strike you, eh?"

And, when his companions could begin dimly to bring the suggestion into focus, he had his moment of triumph.

Mr. Tridge, making handsome amends for his recent behaviour, rose and forcibly pounded Mr. Dobb's shoulder, shouting aloud his unshakable belief that Mr. Dobb was a wonder, a knock-out, and a marvel, and challenging the universe to produce the equal to Mr. Dobb. Mr. Clark, ever a slave to the impulses of emotion, leaped to his feet, and performed a little series of pirouettes indicative of joy. Mr. Lock, dropping his attitude of amused detachment, captured a hand of Mr. Dobb's and shook it fervently.

"Come into a fortune?" harshly inquired the landlord, appearing at this demonstration of high spirits.

"No," airily returned Mr. Dobb. "Only coming."

None the less, the lingering presence of the landlord imposed greater restraint, and the quartet, settling to their table again, resumed the gravity of business.

"Well, this is my idea," said Mr. Dobb. "We'll buy up the old 'Jane Gladys.' We can get 'er for a song. She was only bought at the sale to be broke up. Why, she didn't fetch much more than twenty-five quid, and with labour so dear to break 'er up, they'll be glad to sell her at the least bit of profit. We'll get her for a pound or two over thirty quid, I'll bet."

"'Ow about fitting 'er out again, though?" soberly asked Mr. Tridge. "That'll cost a good bit."

"I've thought that out," responded Mr. Dobb. "We'll raise a loan on the old boat, see, to pay for 'er fitting out. All we'll need in cash is just the money to buy her hull and to keep her going for a bit. Us four'll be her crew, and we shan't draw no wages, because our share'll be a share of the profits."

"And we'll go from port to port, and, knowing what we do, and knowing as much as we do," said Mr. Tridge, "it'll be odd if we don't work up a good connexion pretty quick! That's the idea, ain't it?"

"Exactly! It'll be a little gold mine!" prophesied Mr. Dobb elatedly. "And us four all together again and no end of—of doings! The old life under 'appier conditions—'ow's that, boys?"

"Business combined with pleasure," summarized Mr. Lock.

"We shall be our own masters," said Mr. Dobb. "There'll be no blessed trouble with skippers and owners. We shall be our own bosses!"

"We shall 'ave to 'ave a skipper, though," mused Mr.

Tridge, dubiously. "Board o' Trade, to say nothing of someone to act as figger'ead, and——"

"Well, I thought p'haps as *I*——" said Mr. Dobb, and coughing modestly. "You know, in a coat with brass buttons——"

"Ordering me about?" inferred Mr. Tridge jealously. "No fear!"

"We'd better ship a skipper," said Mr. Lock. "It'll save a lot of trouble and ill-feeling. And we can always sack him and get a new one when we feel like it. We shall enjoy that."

"I come across our old skipper of the 'Jane Gladys' the other day," mentioned Mr. Clark. "Poor old Peter Dutt ain't enjoying retired life ashore on a pension, not a little bit. In fact, come to think of it, 'e did tell me 'e sometime 'ad 'alf a mind to go back to sea. I daresay 'e'd 'ave told me more still, only 'e 'appened to be out with Mrs. Dutt at the time. She'd walked on, you see, and she give 'im just one call. 'Peter!' she calls, sharp, and 'e regular fell over himself starting to run after 'er to catch up with 'er."

"Well, maybe we'll offer him the job," said Mr. Dobb largely. "However, let's get back to the money part. You've heard what I've got to say. *Now* who's got any money?"

"'Ow much 'ave *you* got, 'Orace, old chum?" inquired Mr. Tridge.

"Well, for myself," answered Mr. Dobb, "I daresay I wouldn't mind putting forty quid into the sign-dikit."

"I daresay," agreed Mr. Tridge, warily. "But 'ow much 'ave *you* got?"

"Forty quid, cash and notes," replied Mr. Dobb. "Mostly cash, and nearly all small coins at that. I told

you this morning I'd put a bit aside for a rainy day, didn't I? Well, this is my little umbrella. See? Now what about you, Joe? 'Ow much are you good for?"

Mr. Tridge stroked the nape of his neck and yielded himself to the slippery paths of mental arithmetic. Twice was he on the point of definite statement, and then perceived a flaw in his calculations. Impressing the aid of a pencil and paper, he industriously wrote down and crossed out figures for some while. Eventually he felt empowered to say that, if one or two of his creditors did not unduly press him, and that if the cheque of the new proprietor of the Magnolia Toilet Saloon was all that it purported to be, he could undertake to subscribe twenty pounds to the capital of the syndicate.

Mr. Peter Lock, next approached on the matter, reminded the meeting that he was a young married man, with a young wife and a very young child, and therefore no plutocrat. If, however, he were given a brief while in which to look around, he felt sure that ten pounds would not be a sum unattainable to him.

"Seventy pounds, so far," totalled Mr. Dobb, with satisfaction. "That ain't so bad. And now," he went on, looking none too expectantly at Mr. Clark, "what about you, Sam?"

Mr. Clark coughed, tickled the lobe of his left ear, glanced about him helplessly, and then shifted his feet.

"All I shall 'ave for certain next Saturday," he said, "is thirty-five bob. Thirty-five bob—and out of that I've got to pay me week's lodgings. And that's all I've got," he concluded, gazing piteously from one to the other—"that and the claims of old friendship."

"Oh, well, we'll 'ave to sign you on in the ordinary way!" said Mr. Tridge, with lofty kindliness. "And

we'll get our value out of you in work, you can make yourself sure."

"By rights, Sam," Mr. Dobb severely reminded him, "we oughtn't to let you in at all. Us three is all capitalists, you see, and you're only a protillerian, as they calls it. 'Owever, if you keeps your place, and is properly grateful, you won't find us hard masters. Let's see—capital seventy pounds. It'll be a tight squeeze, but we shall manage it," he foretold with confidence.

"The tighter the squeeze, the better you always manages it, 'Orace," declared Mr. Clark, ingratiatingly.

Three minutes later, after offering a libation to the throne of the gread god, Luck, the four set off from the "Jolly Sailors" to advance, without delay, the affairs of the syndicate. The proximity of the "King's Head" prompted another generous propitiation of that same god, Luck, and when they had unstintedly done him honour there, they repeated the ceremony at the "Eight Bells," and so felt at last fully insured for the first steps in their enterprise.

Arm in arm did Mr. Dobb and Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock march up Shorehaven's ancient High Street. As they went they debated alluring possibilities, such as the carrying of passengers with a liking for card-playing, or quoting special rates of freightage for distilled goods, or obtaining premiums for apprentices. And behind them stalked Mr. Clark, subdued, but uneasy, for he had been reminded to keep his place as a hireling when, a few minutes back, he had complained because a glass on which he had only just started had been inadvertently emptied by Mr. Tridge.

Half-way along the High Street, Mr. Dobb parted from his fellows, and entered an office, and was there engaged in negotiation for awhile. Emerging at length,

he beamed upon his companions, and told them all was well, and that the refitting of the "Jane Gladys" would present no difficulties. As soon as the syndicate could produce proof of ownership, the enterprising ship-builder Mr. Dobb had just interviewed would permit a limited, but still adequate credit.

An understanding such as this amply demonstrated the effectiveness of the rites which had been paid to the mighty Luck, and common prudence suggested further honour to that deity to woo continued favour. Therefore, then, was the "Cutlass and Cannon" visited, and after that the "Full-Rigged Ship." And here casual mention of the name of the "Jane Gladys" brought from a frequenter the gratifying intelligence that the present owners of that disreputable hulk had professed an entire willingness to rid themselves of her for twenty-five pounds.

"Said that a fortnight ago, did they?" queried Mr. Dobb. "Then we'll go right along now and offer 'em twenty! Finance—that's our game!" he vaunted, with an airy twirl of his fingers in the air. "'Igh fi-nance!"

And thereon the party set forth for the ship-breaker's yard, and now Mr. Clark was promoted to a closer equality with his shipmates, so that Shorehaven's narrow thoroughfares were scandalized by the riotous progress of four citizens joined arm in arm and evidencing desire to sing and laugh and talk simultaneously. And thus, ebullient, the syndicate arrived at the gates of the ship-breaker's domain, and Horace, to the accompaniment of cheers from his supporters, prepared to make his way to the proprietor of the business.

"I shall start by offering him fifteen," he said. "And if they 'angs out for more than twenty, I shall pretend to break off the deal."

In view of this strategy, none of his comrades was surprised to see him emerge from the ship-breaker's office within a minute of entering it. But they were not quite prepared for the look of angry dismay on his face, and his first words came as a distinct shock to them.

"'Been sold!" he announced curtly.

"'Oo's been sold?" asked Mr. Tridge.

"She has—the old 'Jane Gladys'! Sold to someone. Sold three days ago!"

"But—but—but we're a signdikit," urged Mr. Tridge, a little hazily. "Did you tell 'im that, 'Orace?"

"I told him a lot of things before that blessed clerk of his showed me out! I reckon as we've been swindled out of our rights! After all, we was *going* to buy her, wasn't we?"

"Let alone us 'aving served on 'er," contended Mr. Clark warmly. "If there's such a thing as law, that ought to count!"

"People ain't got no right to come along, taking the very bread out of our mouths!" observed Mr. Tridge with rancour.

Heavily, dully, the four confederates wandered away from the scene of their disappointment, and somehow found themselves silently filing into the "East India-man Inn." And here they discovered a little plump gentleman who greeted them with a high good-will, nicely tempered with hint of superior rank.

"'Afternoon, sir," said Mr. Dobb, politely enough, for the presence of Captain Peter Dutt, their former skipper on the "Jane Gladys," was sufficient indication of imminent hospitality.

"Not getting too 'igh and mighty to be seen talking to a poor old sea-captain, then?" smiled Mr. Dutt. "And

you all doing so well, too! Business as good with you as ever, I suppose, 'Orace?"

"Better than ever," affirmed Mr. Dobb.

"And Joe a regular lord in 'is own shaving parlour, and Peter snug and comfortable in a steady berth, and old Sam Clark, there, master-mariner of a ferry. Ah, you boys 'ave done well," approved the little captain.

"We 'ave, sir," their pride impelled them to acquiesce.

"Shore life has suited you better than it suits me," remarked Captain Dutt slowly.

"Ah! and 'ow is Mrs. Dutt, sir?" courteously asked Mr. Dobb. "Quite herself?"

"Quite!" said the skipper, and seemed to repress further information concerning his spouse. "By the way," he went on, leaning towards them, "I'm going to tell you a little secret. I'm going back to the sea."

He drew back to regard the effect of the announcement upon them, and complacently wagged his head at their murmurs.

"I am, and you'll never guess the old boat I'm going in command of, neither!"

"Not—not—not the old 'Jane Gladys'?" stammered Mr. Dobb.

"That's the boat. The old 'Jane Gladys.' There's a gent—well, he's been quite a gent to me, any way—he's bought her, and—— And this is in confidence, mind. I don't want my missis to get to hear of it just yet."

A ready chorus promised secrecy of the deepest.

"Aye, a gent's bought the old boat—a gent with pots and pots of money. Some folks might call him a profiteer, but that don't seem to me altogether respectful. But he's going to have the old 'Jane Gladys' fitted

out as a sort of yacht. Rosewood etceterys! Silk curtains!" mentioned Captain Dutt in tones almost reverent. "Up'olstery! Electric light!"

"And you've got the ticket?" queried Mr. Dobb, blinking.

"Aye, I got to hear what was in the wind, and I got a gent who knows a gent who knows him to put in a word for me. He don't know anything about the sea. Seems to me all he wants is a chance to knock about and spend a lot more money."

"'S'trewth!" murmured Mr. Dobb. "A job on the old 'Jane Gladys' under them conditions—what a chance for doings!"

"And I don't mind telling you," continued Captain Dutt, "in a way, I'm sorry you're all doing so well ashore. You see, he left it to me to engage a crew, and naturally I'd like chaps who served with me before, and——"

Within thirty seconds the personnel of the "Jane Gladys'" crew was a matter abundantly and emphatically and all but legally settled. Long after Captain Dutt had quitted the "East Indiaman," libation after libation was still being poured at the altar of the great god Luck.

"I know I shall wake up in a minute," Mr. Clark had come to muttering over and over again, with an amazed incredulity in his own good fortune.

Mr. Tridge blissfully dreamed long dreams of himself in a snow-white costume, reclining on the upholstery of a boat owned by a millionaire, and therefore certain to be liberally found in choice and rare liquors. Mr. Lock, for his part, saw visions of himself promoted to a sort of super-stewardship.

And Mr. Horace Dobb did nothing but remind the

company that he, and he alone, had set in train the sequence of visits which had brought them to so entrancing a prospect.

"But don't forget that this here toff is really the man what has done us out of our rights with the 'Jane Gladys,' " he requested his hearers. "If it 'adn't been for him, she'd 'ave been our boat by now. So I reckon we 'ave every right to try to get our own back."

"What do you mean, 'Orace?" asked Mr. Lock, "How can we get our own back?"

"I don't know," admitted Mr. Dobb frankly. "But there's something I don't quite understand what is making my mouth water. 'Rosewood etceterys,' 'pots of money,' 'don't know nothing about the sea,' " he quoted. "Things like that mean chances to chaps like us. P'raps we'll still be the owners of the 'Jane Gladys' some day. Who knows?"

"'Orace, don't be too ambitious," warned Mr. Tridge. "Don't you try to pick up more than you can lift."

"Mind you, I don't really know what I do mean. But there's something *there*," stated Mr. Dobb, tapping his forehead. "Hinstinct, I suppose it is. And it tells me that there's big days ahead. Anyway, the signdikit is by no means busted, and we've still got our capital if we want it. Don't let any of us forget for a moment that we're still 'Orace & Co.' Drink up, boys! I give you the toast—'Orace & Co.'—good luck to 'em!"

They honoured the toast to the very last driblet in their glasses and then, roseate, sat back and looked at each other out of bright, bright eyes.

CHAPTER III

GOSSIPS of Shorehaven, lingering at each other's gates during the flaccid hours of the afternoon, or, if the opposite sex, foregathering on the swingbridge of the harbour in the cool of the evening, unanimously agreed that never before had there been such a wealth of local material for comment and criticism as the past six weeks had lavished forth.

To begin with, there had been piquant developments in the commercial life of the little town. Though only affecting two establishments, each of small size, the changes loomed large in public interest, for the two enterprises shared an ethical atmosphere peculiarly their own.

Of these businesses, one was the Magnolia Toilet Saloon, and it had recently passed from the proprietorship of Mr. Joseph Tridge.

No one who was aware of the consistent inaccuracy of Mr. Tridge's sporting calculations was surprised by the transfer of the saloon to alien hands. It was the tardiness of its incidence that gave spice to public discussion of the matter.

The other establishment which had become involved in change was the little shop in Fore Street, heretofore inspired and controlled by Mr. Horace Dobb.

Completely transferred now was the character of its trade. No longer did it concern itself with the comings and goings of second-hand furniture and third-hand oddments. The whole of its musty, rusty stock had

been acquired to the uttermost cracked teapot in one comprehensive deal, by a rival trader.

At present the shop made bid for patronage by exhibiting in its window an unpractised confusion of cheap stationery and homely medicaments and inexpensive adjuncts to the feminine toilette.

Mr. Dobb now only too evidently had no active share in the conduct of its business, though sometimes he was to be seen in shirt sleeves and slippers at the doorway, sunning himself somewhat defiantly, and flinging terse replies over his shoulder into the interior of the shop.

But, when questioned as to his intentions for the future, he would merely shrug his shoulders, as though to intimate that the subject was really not worth discussion. . . .

Again, Shorehaven found much to exercise its mind in the equivocal behaviour of Mr. Samuel Clark.

That stout and ancient functionary, when at length his actions had inevitably brought him under catechism, roundly declared that his sole desire, as a widower of long standing, was that he should be left in peace by all females for the remainder of his years.

In view of this statement, his behaviour towards one lady in particular was entirely baffling.

She was a Mrs. Brockway, a stranger to the locality, and she had made a sort of hobby of using the ferry-boat, though only when Mr. Clark was in charge. And he, despite his professed misogyny, was frequently to be observed resting on his sculls in mid-stream in order to wag an arch forefinger at his fair freight. Moreover, when setting her down at the landing-place, he had several times been overheard to address to her parting words which, when shrewdly analysed, proved to be not completely devoid of tender significance.

Yet, when this Mrs. Brockway might come again to the ferry, she would find a substitute for Mr. Clark officiating in his boat, while Mr. Clark himself, though he alleged distressing ailments as reasons for his absence from duty, was in the window of the "Jolly Sailors" all the time, nodding and smiling with cynical derision at the lady's disappointment.

Also, there was the case of Mr. Peter Lock for the town to condemn.

A month ago, and more, had Mr. Lock precipitately quitted the employ of the "Royal William" Hotel, and still he had not yet been detected in the act of endeavouring to secure another situation.

That he should find other outlet, and, preferably, other scenes for his labour, was a course constantly recommended to him by those who wearied of hearing him narrate diverting anecdotes which ended unexpectedly in a direct financial appeal. Mr. Lock, however, always burked the topic of work by asserting his complete agreement with the axiom that points the futility of meeting trouble halfway.

Shorehaven, aware that Mr. Lock possessed a wife, a child, and a great many creditors, restively sought to controvert this philosophy of his, but Mr. Lock merely smiled his ingenuous smile, and expressed his unwavering confidence in the workings of Providence.

But above all these personal matters, towering supreme in public interest, was the astounding change of fortune which had come to the erstwhile unsavoury barque, the "Jane Gladys."

After a long and smudgy career of petty traffic upon the nearer seas, she had actually been awaiting disintegration at a shipbreaker's yard, when she was reprieved, at the last moment, from so conclusive a fate.

Not only was her disruption arrested, but it was indefinitely postponed, for the whims of destiny had ordained that she was to be refitted and set again to creeping about the surface of the waters.

Shorehaven soon contrived to learn that the saviour of the "Jane Gladys" was a gentleman of extraordinary wealth. The fact that he had garnered his riches during the closing stages of that great war which so thoroughly achieved its splendid ideal of preventing all future warfare, could not but lay his commercial methods open to suspicion. So extensive was his opulence, however, that respect for it almost immediately eclipsed every other emotion in the breasts of Shorehaven's population.

It was the design of this gentleman, Shorehaven was permitted to learn, to proceed hither and thither upon the sea with an ease and dignity appropriate to his wealth. To that end had he purchased the "Jane Gladys," acquiring her in preference to the orthodox steam-yacht of his compeers, because he was temperamentally averse from ignoring anything which looked like a bargain.

But, having secured the "Jane Gladys," he at once took steps to make her more congruous with his own high estate, and, in furtherance of that noble aim, he had issued a sequence of stupendous orders.

His commands secured quick obedience. A ruthless legion forthwith swarmed about the "Jane Gladys," prising up boards, tearing down bulkheads, and dragging asunder her very vitals, so that in the briefest of periods she was but sheer, empty hulk.

And next, with the same inexorable rapidity, the policy of reconstruction proceeded. A cohort of workmen permeated her, measuring and sawing and ham-

mering and painting and varnishing. Craftsmen came from distant London to busy themselves in her interior with costly fabrics and rare woods and insulated wires.

Tapering new masts did she receive, as in a day, and experts clung aloft to them, and weaved rigging about her as a spider spins its strands. Her spars seemed to come in the twinkling of an eye, and when next the townspeople looked, snowy sails were already furled along her yards.

Scarce an hour of the day or night was there when she was not the scene and subject of embellishment. Swiftly was her apotheosis attained, and, within fifty days of her change of ownership, she lay at the quayside, a thing of luxury, delectable in all save her history. . . .

Came a morning when the last batch of workmen looked round the "Jane Gladys" with self-complacent nods for the fruits of their labour, and then stepped from her deck for the last time. The "Jane Gladys" was equipped and ready to put to sea again.

All that morning, the people of Shorehaven contrived opportunity to drift down to the harbour to gaze upon this miracle that had been wrought under their very eyes. A queer little sense of surfeit possessed them. Vaguely they felt that they had had their fill of excitement, and that any future surprises life might hold could only come as anti-climaxes after so cumulative a space of excitement.

In this satiate mood, the inhabitants gazed long minutes upon the glorified "Jane Gladys" and returned to their homes. Perpending the future flatness of existence, they swept up and down the narrow, twisting streets.

Eldering inhabitants, hovering between sleep and

wakefulness in their after-dinner chairs, blinked crossly at the unwonted activity outdoors. Next, roused to a querulous curiosity by the continuous hurried passing of footsteps, they went to the threshold to inquire. What they were told there drew them to the corner of the road to seek verification. And in the end, utterly refusing to believe the tidings except on the evidence of their own eyes, they were brought to the High Street, the goal of all the hastening feet, the scene that staged what proved to be, after all, the culminating and transcendent surprise of the past six weeks. . . .

Adown the centre of Shorehaven's ancient highway there progressed four individuals, arm-in-arm, sauntering in a *dilettante* way, and affecting to be quite unaware of the sensation they were creating. All of them were only too well known to the community, but the people, pressing eagerly forward, peered at them as though they were visitants, from a world so strange that even now their actuality might reasonably be doubted.

The four individuals varied widely in personality, for one was aged and plump, and another was slim and youthful, while the third was remarkable for a kind of pallid sleekness of complexion and an extraordinary air of patrician superiority, and the fourth was big-boned and clumsy of feature and gait. Despite these differences, all four exhibited uniformity in their garb, and patently it was this similarity of costume that gave rise to the present civil commotion.

Townspeople trotted and shuffled from alleys and byways to gaze in speechless incredulity at the spectacle presented by Messrs. Clark, Lock, Dobb, and Tridge. Bearded amphibians came clattering up in sea-boots from the waterside to stare and shake their heads and stare again. Women marvelled on a high, bewildered

note: children, open-mouthed, walked backwards before the quartet, expecting they knew not what: old, old inhabitants looked, and rubbed their ancient eyes, and looked again, and then turned to each other to challenge memory to recall an equal shock.

For new and spacious trousers of blue serge graced the legs of each of the four, and their heads were crowned with conical caps of red wool, with tassels that bobbed and swung jauntily over the left ear. All four wore pristine blue jerseys of a closeness of fit calculated to set off the figure to advantage, so that the curves of Mr. Clark's *svelte* waist were even more accentuated than usual.

And vivid across the chest of each jersey flamed the name "Jane Gladys," embroidered in large letters of scarlet.

So, in their pageantry, the four moved onward, without acclaim, without derision, but hemmed about, as it were, with great banking clouds of stunned, sullen astonishment. And thus they devastated the High Street, leaving behind them a mere perspective of staring inaction, and next they traversed Bridge Street, with similar effect.

And so they came at last to the harbour, and here, after unbending to a ribald kissing of hands to their spectators, they walked up the gang-plank of the "Jane Gladys," and boarded again the ship which, in its former life of ignominy, had been their home for so many guileful seasons and so many picaresque cruises.

A globular little figure bounced across the deck to meet them, dazzling their eyes with the coruscating newness of his brass-buttoned uniform.

"Come aboard, sir!" smartly reported Mr. Dobb, and

implied generous recognition of the enhanced status of the "Jane Gladys" by flourishing his palm in ceremonial salute.

"Pleased to see you, me men," responded Captain Peter Dutt, with unprecedented stiffness.

Mr. Dobb's eyebrows jerked up at this exhibition of arrogance in one who, aforetime, had always cultivated the friendliest of terms with his myrmidons. Mr. Tridge remarked obscurely that it was funny how quickly a little new paint mounted to the head.

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" blithely chanted Mr. Lock, making apt employment of a once-popular refrain.

"'Ardly the time or place for singing, is it, Peter?" severely asked Captain Dutt, and these few words and the manner of their delivery amply indicated that the new splendours of the "Jane Gladys" had engendered a desire in her captain's mind to inculcate an altered and improved discipline aboard his charge.

The four sailormen looked at their skipper and smiled, as fond parents may smile at the presumptions of a child.

"Oh, well, we *are* 'ere, ain't we?" contended Mr. Tridge, and lighted a cigarette.

Captain Dutt frowned heavily. This manifestation of displeasure passing quite unheeded, he coughed, as it were, remindingly, and cocked his head.

"Soon 'ave that cold of yours better when we gets out to sea, cap'n," Mr. Tridge told him, with an affectionate smile.

"There's some things I want to see lost *before* we gets out to sea," said the skipper. "Shore manners, for instance."

“’Ere, ’ere!” cordially endorsed Mr. Clark. “We don’t want no la-di-da bowing and scraping aboard ’ere, do we, sir?”

“Discipline——” began the skipper on a dogmatic note.

“’S’ttruth, what’s in all them big cases?” interrupted Mr. Tridge with the liveliest curiosity. “Grub?”

“By the looks of it,” hazarded Mr. Clark. “I do ’ope there’s plenty of jam. I’m very partial to a bit of jam, I am. A bit of water-crease is all very well to give a relish to your tea, and so’s radishes, too, though they’re dodgy, tricky things for them what ain’t got too many teeth. But jam——”

“For myself,” confessed Mr. Dobb, “a nice tin o’ pineapple chunks——”

“We was talking about discipline,” said Captain Dutt, striking in to recover the talk from this dietetic divergence. “Now, I want you men to understand, right from the start-off——”

“Bless you, cap’n, *we* understand!” said Mr. Dobb. “We haven’t sailed with you all those times in this very boat without coming to understand each others’ ways. Of course, there’ll be a certain amount of what you might call discipline, but——”

“But not enough to spoil friendship,” put in Mr. Lock, and Mr. Tridge’s nod betokened that this phrased the situation very neatly.

“Yes, we’ll stand by you all right, sir, if you stands by us,” promised Mr. Tridge. “We’ve dragged you through more scrapes than one, and we can drag you through a lot more yet.”

“No, don’t be uneasy about us, cap’n,” begged Mr. Dobb, “You won’t find us altered a little bit.”

“We ain’t the sort to be altered,” affirmed Mr. Tridge.

"Not by anything," added Mr. Lock, not without a certain peculiar emphasis.

"Don't you worry about *us*," recommended Mr. Clark. "We understand you all right, cap'n. And I should think you understands us by now."

"Mind you," remarked Mr. Dobb, in tolerant accents, "I don't say you ain't got your faults as a skipper. Us chaps in the fo'c'sle may not always be able to see eye-to-eye with you. But you can depend on us being the same 'elpful friends of yours as we've always been, right from the beginning. So don't you start worrying yourself about discipline. We'll look after ourselves all right."

Captain Dutt eyed his crew in rather a bleak and helpless way, but Mr. Dobb was smiling back at him in the most encouraging manner. The other three mariners, with suggestion of a satisfied audience dispersing, were already strolling away to examine their surroundings.

"Oh, well, I dare say you'd like to look over the boat, now," said the skipper, belatedly, and waved a permissive hand.

"Begin as we mean to go on—that's my motter," said Mr. Dobb to his companions as they set forth on their tour of inspection. "Anyway, we ain't lost our knack of 'andling the skipper, thanks be! That's one asset to 'Orace & Co.' as a start-off."

Rather more than an hour later, the four shipmates arranged themselves floridly about their *édition de luxe* of a forecastle, and gratefully yielded their minds to pleasant imaginings of chicanery and defraudment. Silent were they for a considerable while, their untethered thoughts browsing contentedly upon all sorts of peccant possibilities, while high above them shone the

sun of their present fortune, warming them with a fine sub-conscious sense of prosperity and well-being.

"She'll do!" said Mr. Dobb at last. "A man's got chances aboard 'ere. I ain't asking for anything better."

"Very nicely she's been re-conditioned, that I will say," testified Mr. Clark. "Not so 'omely, may be, but certainly 'andsomer and 'igher class."

"I like them cupboards in the smoking-room, where they're going to keep the decanters and cigars, etcetery," approved Mr. Dobb. "Flimsy sort of locks they'd got, did you notice?"

"'Course I did!" returned Mr. Tridge, indignant at this aspersion on his intelligence. "Besides which, there's a big skylight right between 'em. Very trustful, unsuspecting, Christian sort of arrangement, *I* thought it."

"I don't quite see what 'e wanted to waste all that space on a bathroom for, though," criticized Mr. Clark. "'Owever, I dare say 'e knows. Still on the 'ole, the old boat 'as been improved wonderfully. Sort of cross between a soda-fountain and the entrance to a picture-theatre, she is, now. And I must say I admire the dec'rations in the saloon. Very 'andsome!"

"A bit ro-cocky," demurred Mr. Lock, to uphold his reputation for superior taste and education.

"Anyway, they'll do all right for *us*," stated Mr. Dobb. "The sort of chaps we'll be entertaining in the saloon, when the old boat is our property, won't know——"

"Ain't you looking a bit ahead, 'Orace?" queried Mr. Tridge. "Ambition's all very well, but I reckon you wants a microscope, not a telescope, to see our chances of ever owning the boat ourselves."

"If she don't become our property in the end," stoutly returned Horace, "it won't be *my* fault."

"Yes, but 'ow are we going to get 'er, 'Orace?" very pertinently demanded Mr. Clark.

"Pyrits," playfully suggested Mr. Tridge. "We're all going to mutiny, and seize the old boat, and be pyrits ever after."

"Go on—are we, 'Orace?" appealed the startled Mr. Clark, in all seriousness. "A bit risky, won't it be? Of course, if *you* think it's all right," he added, being ever of a simple unswerving loyalty to Mr. Dobb's genius, "there's no more to be said, though it certainly is a bit more than I bargained for."

"Just 'ow we're going to do the trick, I don't quite know," said Horace. "But I've got several ideas floating about at the back of my brain, and, one of these days, one of 'em will get stranded, and I'll have a good look at it. There's no knowing what we shan't contrive if only we all keeps our eyes open and our mouths shut."

"Wonder what the new owner is like," mused Mr. Lock.

"I hope 'e's one of them quick, impulsive chaps," said Horace. "That sort of chap, with plenty of money——"

"Why, 'e might *give* us the blessed boat one day!" cried Mr. Clark, sitting up expectantly at the very thought.

"'E might," sceptically conceded Mr. Tridge. "Seems to me, a quick, impulsive boss is far more likely to give us the sack one day."

"Oh, well, we shall be seeing him presently," remarked Mr. Lock. "The skipper's expecting the party aboard any time now."

"I understand the new owner has got 'is niece coming with him for the first trip," mentioned Horace. "Rather a pity you and me are both married already, eh, Peter? But, come to think of it, there's still a chance!" he went on excitedly. "You ain't married, are you, Joe?"

"Depends," doubtfully replied Mr. Tridge. "I ain't sure of the law quite. At all events, it's seven years since she last saw me."

"Anyway, 'Orace, I'm eligible," volunteered Mr. Clark. "I'm a genuine widower, don't forget. Not as I'm at all keen on a second attempt, as you know, but if the young lady is 'andsome and good-tempered, and——"

"You've got your Mrs. Brockway," Mr. Tridge reminded him.

"'Er?" ejaculated Mr. Clark, and made a grimace of extreme distaste. "Not if she comes up the gang-plank on 'er bended knees to me! She's seen the last of *me*, I can tell you!"

"Pity not to let 'er see you in them new togs, Sam," bantered Horace. "We didn't half make 'em stare, coming down 'Igh Street, didn't we? I could see every one thinking what a sin and a shame it was that us four should get the job."

"Ah, and they 'ad more than half a mind to let the new owner know what they thought our characters was, too," supplemented Mr. Tridge. "And then they changed their minds. They decided they'd rather see us four out of Shore'aven at any price."

"Some'ow we ain't proved a popular success in the town," murmured Mr. Clark in tones of soft regret. "Jealousy, I suppose. It was very good of the skipper, though, to keep it a secret about us being signed on 'ere."

That Mrs. Brockway ain't 'ad a chance to come crying and snuffling round me because I'm going to leave 'er. If she'd guessed what was up, she'd 'ave been trying 'ard to get me to make a lot of silly, sentimentalical promises before I sailed."

"The skipper kept it quiet for 'is own sake," explained Mr. Tridge. "'E didn't want it come to the ears of his wife till it was too late for 'er to interfere. Some'ow she don't seem to think we're good company for her husband."

"*My missis* took my going very calm, that I must say," remarked Horace. "'I'm sailing on the '*Jane Gladys*' to-night,' I tells 'er when I come down dressed in these togs. 'Oh?' she says, and just goes on with 'er dinner. 'It's no good your making a fuss, because everything is fixed up,' I tells her. And she says, 'Why ever do you think I should make a fuss?' And then I says, 'I don't know 'ow long I'll be away,' and she says, 'All right, I'll try and change some of your shore-clothes for a few geraniums. I've always wanted a pot or two of flowers for the parlour window.'"

"There's two or three people I owe money to," said Mr. Tridge indolently. "They'll be surprised at me clearing out, I reckon. Well, I *say*, 'two or three,' but really——"

"Anyway, anyone will have a job to serve a summons on *me* for awhile," said Mr. Lock, and deemed that he had said sufficient.

And with that the forecastle came again to a cosy, meditative quiet.

CHAPTER IV

A FULL hour passed before the four somnolent sailormen were disturbed, firstly, by the churring of a motor-car on the adjacent quay side, and, next, by the tramp of feet arriving on the deck above.

"Tumble up, there—tumble up!" Captain Dutt was importantly bawling. "All 'ands on deck! Tumble up, my lads, tumble up, now!"

"Why, the old man's getting quite nautical!" lazily commented Mr. Tridge.

"He must 'ave been reading some of them books about sea-life," theorized Horace. "Wonderful educational, they are, to ignorant chaps like us. He'll start calling out 'Shiver me timbers!' soon, see if he don't. I once read a book——"

Mr. Dobb's literary reminiscence was truncated by a second summons from the skipper, similarly framed, but even more urgently stressed.

"What's 'e want to keep shouting like that for?" complained Mr. Tridge aggrievedly. "If 'e thinks I'm going to take any notice, 'e'll 'ave to shout a bit quieter. Putting on airs like that, after all the years we've sailed with 'im!"

"I suppose 'e's showing off to someone on deck," guessed Mr. Clark and yawned mightily. "I do think 'e might 'ave a bit of consideration for *us*, though! I was just in the middle of a lovely nap when——"

"Yeh lazy, loafing lot of lubbers, tumble up, will yeh?" passionately bellowed the voice of the skipper.

"Yeh discipline's all gone to blazes, but I'll send yeh there to fetch it back before I've done with yeh! Are yeh coming up, or 'ave I got to come and fetch yeh, yeh sleepy-'eaded pack of snoring, dust-covered Methusalums!"

At these harshnesses, the four mariners slowly brought themselves to sitting postures. There was a little wait while each allowed himself time to realize the full measure of Captain Dutt's temerity.

And then the voice of their skipper, modulated to little more than a whisper, again came down to them.

"Do come on up, boys!" he was entreating, in accents almost piteous. "*You might!* You're making me look so stoopid, with the new owner aboard 'ere, too, and all."

"In that case, we'd better make a good impression to start off with," Mr. Dobb recommended his shipmates. "We can tell the skipper what we think about *'im*, afterwards."

Hastening on deck, and passing their captain with their chins tilted offensively, the four mariners found themselves in presence of a grouping which at once monopolized their trained powers of observation. Even the curt audacity with which Captain Dutt ordered them to stand in line was allowed to pass unchallenged by them, so intent was their scrutiny of the Olympian party that had descended on the "Jane Gladys."

A short, clean-shaven individual occupied the foreground, dominating the whole composition of the group, as a pictured general stands out from the massed portraits of his staff.

A little more than middle-aged, but still far from old, was this individual, and his personality radiated a perky, aggressive self-satisfaction. His small eyes were quick and penetrating, his jaw was heavy without being

firm, and his upper lip looked over-long. He was emphatic in a knicker-bocker suit of light, checked tweed, and his cloth cap was pushed well to the back of his head, revealing his taste in hairdressing to favour an ungrudging use of the scissors.

The thumb of his left hand was thrust into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, and its four companion fingers continually tapped on his chest, as though they were playing a triumphant pæan to his own success. The other hand was employed in taking a cigar to and from his mouth in the consciously elaborate style of those who come late in life to the use of tobacco in that form.

On the right of this gentleman, but a little behind him, stood a lady, unassertively clad, save with regard to her hat, which was a polychromatic turmoil of feathers and flowers and ribbons. Her countenance was uninspired and uninspiring. Her pursed lips and a certain furtive vigilance in her eyes suggested that she was schooling herself to avoid those social pitfalls around her of which she alone knew the abundance.

A little way away a youth of twenty odd years was gazing round him with an air of complete boredom. The beauty of his raiment held decided priority over the attraction of his features. A white flannel suit of exquisite cut graced his frame, tie and handkerchief and socks were a symphony in russet and lilac. He wore no head-covering, and his hair was brushed back to a miracle of glossy smoothness. His eyes, as he looked listlessly about the "Jane Gladys," had all the intelligence, but none of the animation of a cod's, and the languid droop of his figure might have been modelled on an interrogation-mark done in the old New Art style.

A fourth figure completed the group. Taking a sort

of forlorn interest in her surroundings was a girl of face and form so engaging that, at sight of her, the aged but still impressionable Mr. Samuel Clark felt an added thrill of gratification in his good luck to be a member of the crew of the "Jane Gladys."

"Now, me lads," said Captain Dutt fussily, "just pay attention to what you're going to 'ear. This"—he indicated the elder gentleman—"is our new owner, Mr. Pidgett, and he's wishful to say a few words to you."

"That's right," affirmed Mr. Pidgett. "So far I've left everything that concerns you to the captain here, but now I just want to speak a few words to you myself."

"'Ere, 'ere, sir," sycophantically inserted Mr. Clark.

"John Blunt, I am," stated Mr. Pidgett; "plain speaking, and plain dealing—that's *me!*"

"And very good hearing too, sir," hazarded Horace.

"I just want to tell you, first of all," said Mr. Pidgett, "that I hope you'll like your jobs, and that we shan't none of us fall out. If we do——"

He tucked his cigar between his lips, emitted a little series of vigorous puffs, and once more removed his cigar.

"John Blunt, I am," repeated Mr. Pidgett. "If there's anything I don't like, I say so. Speak my mind straight out. That's *me!* If I'm not pleased with anything or anybody——"

Again he left his sentence unfinished, and had recourse to his cigar. This time he looked a little pointedly at the young man in flannels, who merely shrugged a shoulder in languid unconcern.

"A plain man," said Mr. Pidgett, resuming the tale of his qualities, "plain and 'olesome, like one of mother's suet puddens."

Mr. Dobb, perceiving that here was intentional humour, sniggered ingratiatingly. Mr. Clark, similarly prompted, chuckled amusedly and smacked his knee, and said, audibly but very respectfully, that that was "a good 'un." The superior young gentleman in flannels, however, turned to regard Mr. Pidgett with a pained expression.

"I say!" he expostulated. "Really, pater!"

"A plain man, me: no frills and furbelows," went on Mr. Pidgett, a trifle hurriedly. "No make-believe and fancy names for *me*! Look at this 'ere—look at this here boat. The 'Jane Gladys' she was called when I bought her, and the 'Jane Gladys' she's called now. Though," he added, glancing at the flannelled youth with hint of spite, "if *some* folks had had their way, she'd have been labelled with a fine, fat-headed fancy name. The—the what was it?—'Percy-funny!' But that ain't my way. No fancy names for me. No flummery. The 'Jane Gladys' she was, and the 'Jane Gladys' she is."

The four sailormen very successfully mounted a look of solemn admiration for such stalwart Spartan principles.

"Same way," continued the new owner, "my name's a plain one, and I keep to it. No double-barrelling of it for me, and no hyphening and what-notting of it, either, whatever silly changes *some* folks would like me to make. James Pidgett—that's *me*! Pidgett! Every one knows the name! Pidgett, and I'm proud of it. You've all heard the name Pidgett before, haven't you?"

The crew of the "Jane Gladys" gave a somewhat coy and slow acquiescence.

"Of course you have!" asserted their employer.

“‘Pidgett’s Pickles!’ That’s me. Amongst other things, of course. ‘Pidgett’s Pickles’ and——”

“Look here, I say, pater,” interrupted the fine youth restively, “do you know, I wonder you don’t have an advertisement of the bally pickles painted on every one of the bally sails!”

“And not a bad idea, neither,” said Mr. Piddgett, glancing up at the furled canvas. “I’ll turn that idea over in my mind; blessed if I don’t. Glad,” he added sarcastically, “very glad, indeed, you’re beginning to take an interest in the business at last, my boy.”

“I always said,” sharply remarked the elder lady speaking for the first time, “has ‘e’d—as ‘e’d—I mean——”

She stopped and pursed her lips very tightly.

“That’s all right, ma,” said Mr. Piddgett tolerantly; “it’s only natural as you’d stick up for Stan, but,” he went on with symptom of rising temper, “you know as well as I do, if ever there was a—a——”

He, in turn, checked himself, and gazed at the youth in a balked way. That elegant individual, assuming an injured mien, lighted a cigarette.

“That’s my son, Mister Stanley,” said Mr. Piddgett, speaking with great restraint, and addressing the engrossed crew before him. “When I ain’t ‘ere—when I ain’t here, he’s boss. Understand? But only when I ain’t here! See? And this is my wife, Mrs. Piddgett,” he concluded shortly, “and this is my niece, Miss Barton. All right—that’s all I’ve got to say.”

He made a gesture of dismissal, but Horace, always controlled by a penchant for ceremonial, stepped forward with some idea of offering a verbal address of welcome to these august new-comers aboard the “Jane Gladys.” The unencouraging stare with which his first

words were received by Mr. Pidgett, however, caused him hastily to abandon his intention. His voice tailed away into silence, though he still sought to convey the sentiment of his greeting by a sunny smile.

"And who the devil may you be?" irately demanded Mr. Pidgett.

"Me, sir? I'm 'Orace, sir," replied Mr. Dobb, a little reproachfully, as though he were disappointed to find that Mr. Pidgett was ignorant of his identity.

"And what do you do aboard here—besides grin?"

"Me, sir? I'm the cook," explained Horace. "Mostly."

"Oh, the cook, eh? Ah, well, I dare say Mrs. Pidgett will have more to say to you than I shall! That'll do! You can all go now!"

The four seamen thereupon retired again to the forecastle and reverted to the easy attitudes from which Mr. Pidgett's arrival had called them. Scarce a minute later they looked up from their couches at a light footfall, and discovered that Captain Dutt was apologetically intruding on their privacy.

"Well, what do you think of 'em, lads?" he asked.

"I know what we think of *you*," coldly replied Horace.

"Shouting and yelling like a slave-driver at us," said Mr. Tridge. "Seems to me you've got us 'ere under false pretences, cap'n. There never used to be none of that bullying and nigger-driving on the 'Jane Gladys' in the old days, and I must say I never expected it would start now."

"There's no 'iding it, sir," remarked Horace, "we're disappointed in you. If ever you told me that the man we'd 'elped out of so many little awkward positions——"

"Remember that time we got Mrs. Dutt to go back 'ome 'alfway through a trip she was taking with us?" asked Mr. Tridge.

"And remember 'ow we found the way out for you that time you went and signed the pledge so silly, sir?" demanded Mr. Clark.

"And do you remember how we diddled that policeman at Bristol when he came down on purpose to see you?" severely inquired Mr. Lock. "I shouldn't have thought you'd have forgot that so soon, at any rate, sir."

"Boys, I ain't forgot nothing," said the skipper. "And that's why I've come down to see you now. It's a bit awkward, you see. Mr. Pidgett expects me to run this old boat like clock-work, and I can't do that unless you all 'elp me. Now what I proposes is this: don't you take no offence at me shouting at you a bit. Let him think I've got you all well in hand. Let him even think I'm a bit too tight in my discipline. Anyway, don't take no notice of what I may shout to you, but just do as you're told.

"Huh!" observed Mr. Dobb sardonically.

"Do as you're told," repeated the skipper. "But do it your own way, and at your own rate. Mr. Pidgett won't know no better, anyway. And in return I'll make it up to you private in any way I can. See?"

"Ah, now you're talking!" approved Mr. Dobb. "I see! We're not to let 'im suspect the footing we're on with you? Well, so long as you keeps to your share of the bargain we don't mind obliging you."

"That's right, sir," agreed Mr. Clark. "You shout and bully as much as ever you like, but we shan't take any more real notice of you than we did in the old days when you was in one of your tantrums. That's right, ain't it?"

"That's the idea," returned the skipper, looking much relieved at the happy issue of these negotiations.

He turned and quitted the fore-castle and, reaching the top of the companion, spoke in the severest tones.

"And don't let me 'ave to complain again about it!" he said, and strutted away.

"So far, so good," said Mr. Dobb to his shipmates. "Oh, I don't despair of the prospects of 'Orace & Co.' by no means. A nice snug job to start-off with, a owner with lots of money, a owner's wife not too pushful, a owner's son what's one of them haw-haw toffs, and a kind of secret treaty with our skipper! I don't see what more we wants for a good beginning."

Late that night the "Jane Gladys" left Shorehaven Harbour, and began a cruise which was destined to be its first and last under the proprietorship of Mr. James Pidgett.

CHAPTER V

EARLY next morning, Mr. Samuel Clark was at the wheel of the "Jane Gladys," in impassive control of her course as she swept easily down Channel. Up in the bows, Mr. Joseph Tridge was languidly and intermittently doing something to a length of rope, standing frequently erect, with in-arched back, to indulge in an unstinted yawn.

The sunshine flashed and sparkled on the blue sea, but the air was keen. Mr. Clark, sorrowfully reflecting that at least two hours must elapse before the gratifying aroma of frying bacon could begin to escape from Horace's galley, pulled his knitted cap a little closer down on his head, and summoned meditation to alleviate the tedium of duty.

Of many things did Mr. Clark think as he stood there at the wheel, but mostly his mind travelled along a personal groove, for never had his career been lacking in incident, albeit of the unheroic sort. He had just recalled a chapter of his autobiography, concerning a talented parrot he had desired to sell to an unenterprising Plymouth Brother, and was still smiling at the memory of the latter's precipitate retreat, when he looked up to see Miss Barton approaching him.

"'Morning, miss!" cheerily greeted Mr. Clark. "Up a bit early, ain't you?"

"I suppose I am," she agreed. "Only I woke up, and I couldn't get to sleep again, and it was such a lovely morning, so I thought I'd get up. Besides——"

She stopped, and it seemed to Mr. Clark that she was a trifle anxious and embarrassed.

"You're the—the gentleman who went ashore last night to fetch the rest of our things from the hotel, aren't you?" she inquired. "You know, just before we sailed."

"Yes, miss, I was the—the gentleman," verified Mr. Clark. "You ain't going to tell me that I went and forgot anything are you? Most careful, I was, what with a full written list, and five knots in my 'andkerchief, and everything."

"Oh, no, you remembered everything beautifully," she said. "But——"

She broke off again, and gazed towards the remote white mist which veiled the shore. Mr. Clark, permitting himself a puzzled peep at her profile, noted that her cheeks were tinted with a most becoming flush.

"I suppose you—you didn't see anything of a—of a—a Mr. John Smith?" she asked, with effort at a casual note.

"A Mr. John Smith?" echoed Mr. Clark. "Well, there's three or four John Smiths I know of. More if you include alleybyes. You know," he explained, "not their real names."

She glanced at him quickly, almost in alarm, but it was evident that Mr. Clark's words had not been pointed to a particular allusion.

"John Smith is a name what comes very 'andy to the mind," he continued, "when there's been larks, and police-courts, and so on."

"Oh, but *my* Mr. John Smith wouldn't be at all likely to get into trouble with the police. But I did rather expect to hear something of him, and that's why I got up early on purpose to try and see if I could find you."

"John Smith, eh?" perpended Mr. Clark, doffing his cap for the more convenient titillation of his scalp with the tip of his forefinger. "Let me see now. There's John Smith, the lamplighter, and young John Smith, his son," he catalogued. "And then there's 'Dog-ear' Smith, the shrimper; and 'Stumpy' Smith, the milkman, though same calls 'im 'Pumpy' Smith; and there's 'Snatcher' Smith. They're all John Smiths, really, dotted about the town like. Which one was you referring to special, miss? Though I must say I never saw none of them last night."

"The one I mean doesn't live in Shorehaven. Only I was expecting—I mean, *he* was expecting to arrive last night, and——"

"Do you mean 'e was coming aboard 'ere, miss?"

"Well he—he didn't know. He didn't quite know what he was going to do. But he knew we were leaving Shorehaven in the 'Jane Gladys' last night, and he said——"

"No one told me to look out for 'im, miss," contended Mr. Clark. "'E wasn't on my written list, nor yet 'e wasn't a knot in my 'andkerchief, neither. Mr. Pidgett never mentioned 'im to me, nor Mrs. Pidgett, nor the skipper."

"Oh, no, they wouldn't! They didn't know anything about him. At least——"

"Well, I never see 'im, miss. What I mean is, I might 'ave seen 'im, but not knowing 'is name or what 'e looked like——"

"Hush!" said the girl urgently. "Here's uncle!"

Mr. James Pidgett, leathery of complexion and conspicuously mulatto under the eyes, had appeared on the deck. Mr. Clark stole another glance at Miss Barton and read appeal in her gaze.

"Oh, it's like that, is it, missie? he asked quietly.

She nodded. Something in her shy, almost frightened, confusion stirred Mr. Clark to strange depths.

"I won't give you away, missie," he whispered. "You can trust me all right. Any time old Sam Clark can—— Yes, miss," he went on in much louder tones, for the benefit of the imminent Mr. Pidgett, "that's the idea. I turns this 'ere wheel, and that moves the rudder, like what I've been explaining to you, and then—— Oh, good morning, sir!"

"'Morning," returned Mr. Pidgett, rather surlily.

"'Ad a good night, sir?" solicitously inquired Mr. Clark.

"Never slept a blessed wink!" asserted Mr. Pidgett. "Not a blessed wink! And if you knew the price paid for those blessed beds alone! Sherryton design!" he exclaimed with the utmost disparagement. "Why, I don't believe they're a bit better to sleep on than any other kind."

"Is aunt awake?" asked Miss Barton.

"Sleeping like a top!" replied Mr. Pidgett, as one with a grievance. "A humming-top!"

"I didn't sleep very well, myself," mentioned Miss Barton.

"Why was that?" sharply demanded Mr. Pidgett. "Moping?"

"Oh, no, uncle! It was the strange surroundings, I suppose."

"Any way, I didn't bring you for this holiday to spend all your time moping and fretting," Mr. Pidgett crisply told her. "You know that well enough, don't you, Nora? No sighing and whining and being miserable, if you please!"

"No, no, of course not, uncle!" she agreed. "Oh,

I shall enjoy it, I expect. I'm—I'm sure I shall. Only, of course, at first——" Her lips became tremulous. "It's rather chilly up here, isn't it?" she said. "I—I think I'll go back to my cabin again. Good morning, Mr.—Mr. Clark. See you at breakfast, uncle."

"Some gals," vehemently observed Mr. Pidgett, watching her retreating form, "don't know when they're well off!"

He thrust his hands into his pockets, and stood staring along the deck long after his niece had passed from view. A rankling dissatisfaction clouded his brow. Twice did he draw a deep breath which promised that he was about to unburden something of his private thoughts to Mr. Clark. On both occasions he changed his mind, and in the end, he took to a moody pacing about the deck.

Presently he went to stand beside Mr. Tridge, who thereby became moved to extraordinary energy. Mr. Pidgett, however, appeared to perceive nothing of Mr. Tridge's commendable zeal, and before long he swung round on his heel and resumed his patrol. But, at last, an irresistible craving to voice his grievance to an audience certain to extend sympathy drove him back to Mr. Clark's side at the wheel.

"Some girls don't know when they're well off," stated Mr. Pidgett again.

"No, sir," acquiesced Mr. Clark. "I mean, yes, sir—that's to say, yes, you're right, sir—and, no, they don't, sir."

"There was a time," fretfully remarked Mr. Pidgett, "when that niece of mine was only too glad to get a job as ladies' companion. Of course," he hastened to point out, "it's different for her now. My being what I've made myself, there's no need for her to do anything."

But, as I say, I can remember the day when she was glad to take a job. And now she ain't even pleased at the idea of taking a husband!"

"Well, well!" marvelled Mr. Clark. "Fancy that, now."

"She ain't!" declared Mr. Pidgett. "Not a little bit! Quite the other way, in fact."

Mr. Clark, with a vague sense that he was living at the back of the paragraphs he sometimes came across in stray society journals, again murmured his polite amazement.

"There's plenty of gals would jump at 'alf a—at half a chance of marrying my boy Stan," said Mr. Pidgett resentfully. "And you'd think that Stan, being her cousin and all—— Mind you, I admit that Stan isn't exactly all I'd like him to be, not yet," confessed Mr. Pidgett. "I never had a rich father, and 'e 'as—or, rather, I should say," he amended, with a slight cough, "he has. I dare say that's the real difference between young Stan and me. Mind you, I won't say I haven't been fool enough to pay for him to pick up a lot of silly ideas, but they want knocking out of him now."

Mr. Clark tactfully refrained from comment.

"Matter of fact," said Mr. Pidgett, "that's why I've fixed up this trip. It ought to harden him a bit."

"It is a rough life, the sea, sir," ventured Mr. Clark.

"There's no need for it to be rough for *him*," was Mr. Pidgett's sharp response. "I should think I've spent enough money in making the ship comfortable for everybody. Not begrudged anything, I haven't. But, well, you know, knocking about from place to place ought to do him a bit of good. Broaden his mind,

brace him up. He'll find out, p'r'aps, that clothes ain't everything, and—and—— Well, it's bound to do him more good than loafing about shore."

"And I s'pose he's very set on the young lady, sir?"

"He is! Of course he is! Mind you, I'm bound to admit he doesn't show it very much. That's not his way. But he's very fond of her, all the same. Never gets a new motor-bicycle, but what he brings it round to show her, first of all. If he fancies she don't like his tie, he's off, first chance he gets, to change it, and try another. But—well, there it is! She don't seem to take to him as a sweetheart somehow."

"Well, I wonder at 'er being so—so partic'lar as all that. I do, indeed, sir!"

"So do I, man, so do I!" irascibly returned Mr. Pidgett. "You'd think that, out of ordinary gratitude, she'd do what me and her aunt wishes. She's my widowed sister's only daughter, and for the last three years I've made 'em an allowance which no one couldn't call otherwise than 'andsome! Yes, as I say, *h—h—hand-*some!"

"Ah, you've got a kind 'eart, sir!" said Mr. Clark.

"Kind heart? Fiddlesticks! Due to my position, wasn't it? Do you think I wanted folks going about, pointing to the windows of their poky little lodgings, and saying, 'Fancy, that's the place where Pidgett, of "Pidgett's Pickles" and lots of other things, allows his sister to go on living?' Yes, and even then the gal was disposed to be independent, and tried to refuse it!"

"Young!" remarked Mr. Clark, exclusively. "Soft! Romantical!"

"She was only talked over in the end by her mother, and a rare job she had of it, too. And me with my motor standing outside their stuffy little rooms, while

I was inside the house, trying to persuade her for all I was worth. You'd have thought she'd have given due consideration about my having to keep up my position in life, and not been so stubborn, wouldn't you?"

"I only wish people would come round in motors offering *me* 'andsome allowances," observed Mr. Clark. "I'd shove 'em down the front steps and slam the door in their faces, I *don't* think!"

This pleasantry passed unheeded by Mr. Pidgett, who, clearly irritated by the memory of Miss Barton's obstinacy, again began to strut the deck. And Mr. Clark, though his hands were on the spokes of the wheel, and his eyes were roving the sea ahead, was mentally dwelling in the very citadel of the aristocratic world, and feeling the equal at least of any periodical which published its quota of intimate fashionable gossip.

"A hard job we had to persuade her to come this trip at all," confided Mr. Pidgett, returning with his thirst for respectful sympathy still unslaked; "but the wife and myself insisted. We thought that Nora and young Stan, being the only two young folk aboard, might get on better together. *He's* willing enough, in his way, though he ain't the rushing sort, but *she*——"

"I can't 'elp wondering, sir, why she *should* be like that," said Mr. Clark innocently.

"Can't you?" snapped Mr. Pidgett. "I can! Someone else!"

"Go on!" adjured Mr. Clark in artless incredulity. "What I mean to say, sir, you mean that she's got her eyes on someone else? Well, well, 'oo'd 'ave thought it?"

For a few minutes Mr. Pidgett regarded the stout helmsman a little distantly, as though he had come to

sudden disapproval of himself for the extent of confidence he had given a mere lowly hireling. Then human nature reasserted itself over class-distinctions, and he spoke again.

"I happen to know there's someone else she's hankering after. Has been, these past three years. Oh, her mother's told me things! Beggarly kind of a clerk, or accountant, or lawyer, he is. Why I doubt whether he's got more than six or seven hundred a year to live on, from what I've heard. Wish I could meet him. Just once! I'd soon tell him what I thought of a chap who kept running after a gal and spoiling her chances of marrying a fortune."

"You ain't met him yet, then, sir?"

"No, not yet. I know his name—Clifford something-or-other. What is it? Clifford—yes, Clifford Wayfield, that's it. Some sort of a Cockney, 'e is! But I've never been able to find out exactly where he lives. My sister don't know, and Nora won't tell me. He's only been to their house once. My sister don't encourage him, naturally. She wants her gal to marry my Stan, of course. They meet each other outdoors—you know, picture palaces, restyrongs, theatres—that sort of thing. Bit low for a gal in her position, I think."

"And I suppose 'e's smart and good-looking? Good-looking in a different way to Mister Stanley, I mean, o' course," Mr. Clark was quick to make clear.

"Didn't I tell you I've never met him? Just an ordinary looking young fellow, I suppose he is. Ah, and I'll take care Nora don't meet him again in a hurry, either! That's another reason why I brought her for this trip. She won't be able to see the other fellow at all, and she'll be seeing my son Stan all the time."

"That ought to 'elp, one way or another, sir," conceded Mr. Clark. "A fine couple they'll make, any-way."

"They will. She's just the wife for him. Me and my missis are both agreed on that. She'll smarten him up, put a bit of ginger into his ways! Of course, he might marry goodness knows who, if he chose—a duke's daughter, very likely, with the money *he'll* have. Though," Mr. Pidgett's candour compelled him to continue, "I dare say he'd be just as likely to pick on a gal in a beauty chorus, all ankles and grin and hat. And that's another reason why I want to see him settled down and married to Nora as soon as possible. She's the girl I've set my heart on him marrying, and marry him she shall! And that's all there is to it. And—and didn't you ought to be calling out 'Starboard watch!' or something, now and then?" he ended, determined that the time had come to depose Mr. Clark from the high post of confidant and reduce him to his normal inferiority.

"I was just going to, sir," said Mr. Clark, regretfully realizing that he could hope for no further disclosures.

"You mustn't think just because I've been telling you a few things that you can presume on 'em and forget your duties," Mr. Pidgett instructed him.

With this monition, the new owner turned away and strode towards his quarters. His pace soon slackened, however, and, coming to a full stop, he stroked his chin dubiously for a few seconds. Then he came back once more to Mr. Clark.

"Mind you, all what I've told you is in strict confidence," he observed. "What young Stan would say if he knew I'd got a-chattering on private affairs with

—— P'r'aps I didn't ought really to have said so much, only one gets talking and—— I mean to say, my man, you mustn't think I've forgot my position because of all I've been telling you. I—I felt like talking to someone about things, that's all. Of course, I'd rather have talked to the captain, if he'd been about. Still——”

“You won't catch me breathing a single word to a living soul, sir!” promised Mr. Clark impressively.

Mr. Pidgett nodded and returned towards his state-room.

“Starboard watch!” bawled Mr. Clark the instant that Mr. Pidgett became invisible. “Hi, starboard watch!”

Mr. Tridge, up in the bows, lifted his head in acute surprise at Mr. Clark's strange outcry.

“Starboard watch!” again shouted the helmsman, and then, finding that he had won Mr. Tridge's attention, he beckoned imperatively to that mariner.

Mr. Tridge came to him at a run.

“Joe, cut down into the fo'c'sle at once and rouse up 'Orace,” urgently directed Mr. Clark. “Get 'im to come up to me at once. I've got, oh, such a lot to tell 'im! And I wants to get it all off my mind before I forgets a single little bit of it!”

CHAPTER VI

AT a more mature hour of the same morning Mr. Horace Dobb stood in a Napoleonesque attitude within the seclusion of his galley.

On the table before him stood a big enamelled bowl containing potatoes destined for the midday meal; but though Mr. Dobb stared fixedly at them, and had been staring fixedly at them these last ten minues, their exigence had not as yet made more than the faintest of appeals to the outer zone of his consciousness.

For the busy brain of Mr. Dobb was employed in close consideration of matters far more intriguing to an ingenious mind than ever mere vegetables could aspire to be. Already he had mentally filed and indexed every detail of the tidings so torrentially imparted to him by Mr. Clark a few hours earlier. Already he had again and again reviewed the situation as illumined by the light of these new facts in his possession.

And now Mr. Dobb was endeavouring to find a loop whereto an intelligent sea-cook might take hold to haul the position forward to some point where personal benefit could reward such energy.

But though Mr. Dobb frowned never so terrifically at the potatoes, solution of the task he had set himself obstinately eluded discovery. He felt, indeed, like a blindfolded man wandering in a strange, unlighted apartment at midnight in effort to locate the exit which he knows must exit somewhere. A dozen times, metaphorically, did Mr. Dobb imagine that his fingers were

fumbling with the handle of the door; a dozen times did he realize that hope had out-leaped fact.

So that, presently, it was with a kind of indignant relief that he became aware of his name being insistently shouted by Captain Dutt; for the summons gave him opportunity to postpone further examination of his problem, and thus to stave off the evil moment when he must admit to his companions that his vaunted talent for artifice had at last been baffled.

Going aft, he found himself pounced upon by the skipper, who led him into the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Pidgett. The owner's wife, sitting erect in a deck-chair, was knitting with all the grim intensity which that recreation brings to its keenest devotees. Mr. Pidgett, in a similar style of seat, at a more reposeful angle, was gazing about at his property with an expression which was both vigilant and satisfied.

"Young man," said Mrs. Pidgett, looking up sharply at Horace, "do you know how to make a rice pudding?"

"I ought to, mum," modestly contended Mr. Dobb. "I've made 'undreds in my time—thousands!"

"Oh!" said the lady, with a hint of disappointment. "Then you won't want me to show you. Well, you take and see that we always have a rice pudding every day. My husband's very partial to rice pudding."

"No, I ain't!" denied Mr. Pidgett.

"Well, then, you ought to be!" she declared severely.

"Well, I ain't!" insisted Mr. Pidgett. "Give me *volyvongs*, and *peaches Melba*, and *soufflays*. They're the things I really like, when I know I can trust 'em! Rice puddens!" he exclaimed disdainfully. "Chicken-feed I calls 'em!"

"But you know how good they are for you," she said. "You know what that swell doctor said about your in-

digestion? A Sir he was, too," she explained to Horace. "You remember what he said, don't you, pa?"

"He said quite a lot," replied Mr. Pidgett. "So he ought to, too! I had to pay him five guineas for the visit, didn't I? Specialist," he in turn explained to Mr. Dobb. "A man in my position can't afford to go to any other kind."

"Pa—Mr. Pidgett—suffers cruel from indigestion," stated Mrs. Pidgett, giving herself a little jerk forward, as though a topic which she found of never-failing interest had now been fairly broached.

"Not indigestion—dyspepsia," corrected her husband, rather proudly.

"It *used* to be indigestion," she returned. "When you used to go to that doctor round the corner it was indigestion. Real bad Mr. Pidgett is when he gets the slightest touch of it," she informed Mr. Dobb. "And talk about temper!"

"Steady on, ma," requested Mr. Pidgett, resenting such revelations to an underling.

"But you know it is so, pa. And then you goes—you go all dull and quiet and heavy, and an earthquake couldn't get you to take interest in anything."

"That's so," admitted Mr. Pidgett. "I feel as if I couldn't take an interest in anything for the life of me. My legs feel lead, and my chest feels as if I'd swallowed a football."

"Yes," said Mrs. Pidgett, taking up the tale with relish, "and the doctor—the Sir one—gave you a whole list of things to do about your food: things you must have, and things you mustn't have, and things you can have only sometimes. And he told you you were always safe with rice puddings—now, didn't he? And you've found that's the truth, haven't you? 'No shell-

fish,' he said, 'particularly lobsters.' No fresh bread, no——"

"Don't talk about 'em, ma," begged Mr. Pidgett. "I can never think of a nice, fresh, crusty loaf and a lobster without wanting to rush out and have a good tuck-in at 'em!"

"And nicely you'd suffer for it, too! There's nothing pays you out so bad and quick as lobsters and fresh bread, and that you know well enough! But you won't find any aboard here, that's one blessing! When we've finished what we've brought with us in the way of food I shall do all the ordering myself when we goes ashore, and I'll take care that there's no lobsters or anything of that sort included in my orders. But rice pudding you shall have in plenty, that I promise you."

"Blow rice puddings!" impatiently decried Mr. Pidgett.

"So, my man," said the lady, addressing Mr. Dobb, "you'll see as there's always a rice pudding, hot or cold, about the place, in case Mr. Pidgett comes over hungry, unexpected. Don't let me ever have to remind you. I give in to pa over everything else, but his health is the one thing I'm firm on. And if the doctor said rice puddings——"

"All the same," complained Mr. Pidgett, "you would think that a chap as you paid five guineas to would think of something better than rice puddings, wouldn't you?"

"You're quite sure you know how to make 'em, young man?" demanded the lady.

"Quite sure, mum."

"It—it wouldn't be no trouble for me to show you, just once," she offered.

"Very kind of you, mum, but there's no need."

"Oh, very well! I must say it seems a long, long time since I last made a rice pudding myself," observed Mrs. Pidgett quite wistfully. "Sometimes, I—I'm almost afraid I shall have forgotten the way."

"There you go again," grunted Mr. Pidgett.

"Come to think of it, mum," put forward Mr. Dobb, "some folks has their own partic'lar, family receipts for rice puddings. P'r'aps it *would* be better if you was to show me just once the exact way you like 'em made."

A queer little light of gratitude gleamed in Mrs. Pidgett's eyes, and she rose with alacrity to follow Mr. Dobb to the galley.

The consequent lesson in the art of contriving a rice pudding in the form most exactly suited to Mr. Pidgett's requirements was neither long nor complicated, but more than once the preceptress had to make quite sure that her pupil fully comprehended the process under study. For at times Mr. Dobb seemed slow of comprehension, and even a little distrait. Fortunately, Mrs. Pidgett took these symptoms to indicate that Mr. Dobb was feeling rather overwhelmed by his responsibilities as rice pudding provider to the digestion of so important a person as her husband. But, indeed, Mr. Dobb was preoccupied in adding other valuable data to the file stored in his memory, entering therein in imperishable letters record of the full effects producible on Mr. Pidgett by unkind diet, and making special note of lobster and fresh bread in this connexion. These details, Mr. Dobb felt sure, must one day prove of value to a strategic mind.

Mrs. Pidgett, coming to the end of her exposition of rice pudding manufacture, glanced round the galley, inspected a frying-pan with hint of disfavour, and then,

absently, began to scour it at the sink. Horace's appeal to be allowed to complete that service awoke her with a start to the menial nature of her task, and, flushing guiltily, she quitted the galley.

Ten minutes later Mr. Clark, much refreshed by a spell below, came to the cook's sanctum for a little chat. Furnished by Horace with the bowl of potatoes as a valid reason for his presence, Mr. Clark willingly settled himself to the occupation of peeling.

"'Ow's the old 'eadpiece working, 'Orace?" he asked, by way of a conversational opening.

"The old 'eadpiece is all right," said Mr. Dobb.

"Got something all planned already, I dare say, eh?" suggested Mr. Clark. "A wonder, that's what you are, 'Orace. I knew soon as ever I told you what I knew that you'd see something sticking out clear for us, like a light'ouse. I'd 'ave been disappointed if you 'adn't, with your brains," he admitted frankly. "I've never known you lose a moment yet, 'Orace, and if anybody was to tell me that you're flummoxed for what to do for the best, after what I've told you, I shouldn't believe 'em. The first time you're beat, 'Orace, it's the beginning of the end. Once your kind loses its grip they're done with for good and all. But, of course, I knew *you'd* rise to the occasion!"

"Of course," said Mr. Dobb slowly.

"Well, what's the idea?" asked Mr. Clark.

"It's early days yet," returned Mr. Dobb.

"Early days for doing it may be. But, surely, if you've got the idea, there ain't any 'arm in just giving me a 'int what it's to be."

"Well——" began Horace, and stopped.

"Yes?"

"Well——"

"I don't believe you 'ave got a idea," asserted Mr. Clark severely. "You've 'ad all these hours to think it over and you ain't thought of nothing. Why, it's my belief as you're beat!"

"I ain't! I've got an idea, right enough."

"Tell us, then," challenged Mr. Clark. "Go on, tell us."

"The time ain't ripe—the moment ain't favourable," returned Horace, with vague memories of speeches whereby politicians had extricated themselves from similar situations. "There's—there's fresh developments coming."

"You're trying to get out of it! Tell us what the fresh developments is then."

"You'll see 'em for yourself," said Mr. Dobb.

There ensued a little silence, while Mr. Clark carefully finished the peeling of a potato, and then turned to scrutinize Mr. Dobb sceptically for several seconds.

"I'll tell you why you don't tell me," said Mr. Clark at last. "It's because you can't."

"I've said all I'm going to say," returned Mr. Dobb, rather constrainedly. He whistled a few joyless staves. "Let's talk about something else," he suggested, too spiritedly. "What sort of a time did you 'ave ashore last night when you went to fetch them things from the hotel, old chum?"

"Fair to medium," answered Mr. Clark. "They was all shutting."

"Didn't see Mister Stanley come aboard, did you?" asked Horace, rather desperately filling in the hinder stages of another pause.

"I was the last aboard of the lot of 'em," said Mr. Clark. "What was the matter with 'im?"

"Oh, a scream! A proper old scream!" Mr. Dobb assured his shipmate. "You know the theatre 'ere? Well, Mister Stanley 'ad gone there in his full war paint. Evening dress, a pot 'at, white gloves, cane, flower in his button'ole—oh, quite the little dook! I don't know what them fisher chaps up in the gallery must 'ave shouted to him, but I'll bet they found 'im more interesting than the play! Anyway, he came back pretty early, and 'e'd got 'is collar turned up, and 'is coat pulled over to hide 'is shirt front."

"Wish I'd seen 'im," said Mr. Clark, losing some of his mistrust of Horace.

"Oh, well worth seeing!" declared Horace. "Same as the stewardess the boss has brought aboard. You ain't seen her yet, either, have you?"

"No. What's she like?"

"Well, one chap in a 'undred thousand *might* write home about 'er," replied the cook. "But I'll bet not one in a million would ever telegraph! However," he added philosophically, "she's here to look after the ladies, and not to interfere with me, so I ain't troubling. You didn't see anything of your Mrs. Brockway, did you?"

"Took jolly good care not to!"

He was about to say something further, but checked himself, bending his head a little closer over his task. Mr. Dobb, glancing at him, saw the corners of his lips were upturned in a smile.

"What's the joke?" demanded Horace.

"Well, I'll tell you what I did do," said Mr. Clark, looking up with a chuckle. "Strictly as a secret between us two, mind. Well, you remember them conversation lozenges she give me the first two or three times

she come on my ferry? You know," he prompted, reddening at the recollection, "'Naughty boy!' 'I love you!'—them kind of things."

"Yes, you ate 'em to put an end to 'em. I saw you."

"It didn't quite put an end to 'em," related Mr. Clark. "Matter of fact, she kept up that game for several days longer. Used to pick 'em out with saucy, loving messages on 'em and 'and 'em to me, deliberit. Well, I found out where she used to buy the blessed things, a ounce at a time. There was a big bottle full of 'em, and I stepped in and bought up the lot. *That* stopped 'er little game!"

"And what did *you* do with all them lollipops? Eat 'em?"

"Most of 'em. But I kept a few back on purpose to 'ave a little lark with 'er when I left Shore'aven. She 'ad no idea I was sailing on the 'Jane Gladys,' you know. I'll admit I played up to 'er a bit while I was still at the ferry, because I didn't want to lose 'er custom, for one thing, and because I didn't want 'er cutting up nasty with me, for another. Sometimes I said things to 'er without properly meaning what I was saying, and she might 'ave got false ideas in 'er 'ead. So I thought I'd rather keep on the right side of 'er till I 'ad a chance to get clear away."

"And where do the lollipops come in?"

"I'm coming to them. I picked out about a dozen, special ones. There was '*Alas, my pore 'eart!*' and '*Your bright smile 'aunts me still,*' and '*You're too shy!*'—a lot like them. And I done 'em up in a packet and addressed 'em to 'er, and last thing afore I come aboard last night I posted 'em to 'er!"

"Sort of love-letter?" suggested Mr. Dobb, perplexed.

"Not a bit of it! Sarcastical! Can't you see when

she finds out I've slipped off unbeknown to 'er 'ow sarcastical them sweets will be? Give 'er a pretty good idea of what I really think of 'er, won't it? It'll be a lesson to 'er not to be so forward with strange gentlemen another time. Oh, she'll see it's meant sarcastical, right enough. A woman always looks for sarcasm before she looks for anything else."

"She *might* take it like that," said Mr. Dobb dubiously. "On the other 'and——"

"Of course she'll take it like that!" asseverated Mr. Clark, startled. "'Ow else could she take it? It never struck me as she *could* take it any other way."

"Well, '*Alas, my pore 'eart!*' for instance," remarked Mr. Dobb, and spread his palms in an inquiring gesture. "She could take that two ways, couldn't she?"

"'S'trewth, 'Orace, you're right!" agreed Mr. Clark. "I wasn't thinking of anything but being sarcastical, and I clean overlooked everything else. Oh, well," he added, with some satisfaction, "we shan't be going back to Shore'aven for a long, long while, and much may 'appen before we get there. *I* ain't going to bother, anyway. 'Out of sight, out of mind,' that's my motter!"

None the less he was silent as he completed his task, and then, setting the bowl of peeled potatoes on the table, he opened the door of the galley and stepped out.

Immediately he leaped back again and seized the cook's arm in a trembling grasp.

"Look—look!" he gasped, drawing Horace to the window.

"*Now* what's the matter?" asked Mr. Dobb, peering forth. "Can't the owner hold wool for his wife to wind without you goggling and staring at 'em like a—like a sea-serpent?"

"But the—the other one," quavered Mr. Clark; "the one coming up be'ind to 'em, with a white apron on."

"That?" said Horace. "That's the stewardess I was telling you about just now."

"*It's Mrs. Brockway!*" groaned Mr. Clark, and collapsed, limp and stricken, into a chair.

He sat staring there straight before him, his eyes big and round with the woefulness of his plight. Equally surprised was Mr. Dobb at the coincidence, though the total absence of consternation, in his case, made his emotions far less poignant than Mr. Clark's.

But very soon Mr. Dobb banished every trace of amazement from his face. A lofty triumph alone held place on his countenance as he went to stand before his shipmate.

"'There's fresh developments coming,' I says," he reminded Mr. Clark. "'You'll see 'em for yourself,' I says. *Now* are you satisfied?"

CHAPTER VII

A WEEK had elapsed, and the amenities of life on board the "Jane Gladys" very faithfully reflected the wisdom of that proverb which conveys warning of deep currents flowing beneath unruffled surfaces.

Of the exalted, Mr. James Pidgett pursued his leisure undisturbingly enough, seldom imposing his personality upon his employees, save for the briefest of reasons. Beyond the carrying of a chair or the fetching of a rug he caused but little trouble, and, indeed, had all the outward aspect of one taking holiday at its restfullest.

But often, whether reading, idling, or strolling his deck, a furtive discontent would slowly harden on his face, and before long he would be sure to send a side-long glance towards his niece or his son. In the former event, he would seem to be trying to fathom what might be passing now in her thoughts; in the latter contingency, his expression was not so much one of speculation as of smouldering perplexity.

For his part, Mr. Stanley Pidgett showed that he was aware of his sire's scrutiny by exhibiting a sort of lofty resignation which implied that he had abandoned all hope that one of his refined temperament would ever be understood and appreciated by a being of coarser fibre.

Sometimes absorbed members of the crew overheard snatches of talk through the skylights of the saloon, and these made it plain that Mr. Pidgett, senior, was im-

patiently urging Mr. Pidgett, junior, to adopt the tenets of an evangel based on the life strenuous. Angry admonitions to wake up, to get a grip on things, to get on or get out, to do it now, to push or be pushed, with other stimulating slogans, would dart from the elder man's lips, only to be greeted with a languid, complaining drawl by the younger.

As for Miss Barton, she retained her rather forlorn attitude, and her deportment towards her cousin remained at the same unenthusiastic level. And now and then, when encountering Mr. Samuel Clark, she would look a little lingeringly at that stout mariner, as if she found some melancholy solace in the passing presence of one who shared, at any rate not unsympathetically, a secret with her.

And Mrs. Pidgett continued a grim zeal with her knitting needles and wool, though often she would discover some cause to take her to the galley, and, if Horace were absent, he would find on his return evidence of her visit in the form of a few knives cleaned, or a tidied shelf, or a rearranged cupboard.

Similarly, the subordinates aboard the "Jane Gladys" passed their hours in outward tranquillity, without ever a hint of the hopes and ambitions which stirred their souls when they foregathered in private conclave.

Mr. Clark and Mrs. Brockway, the stewardess, had met, and were now quite used to meeting. To Mr. Clark's chagrin, the lady had confessed to him that she had been perfectly well aware that he was taking up employment on the "Jane Gladys."

She herself, she explained, had been enjoying a holiday conveniently at Shorehaven before entering on her duties, and one day she had had to see Mr. Pidgett on

one of his flying visits to the town. Some question of State insurance had arisen at that interview, and Mr. Pidgett had entered her name in his pocketbook, at the tail of a list of the personnel of the ship's crew. The list was written in a fine, bold hand, and, peeping over her employer's shoulder, Mrs. Brockway had at once discerned that it included the name of Mr. Samuel Clark. The discovery, she averred, was a shock and a great worry to her, until she realized that this was merely another manifestation of that shyness of Mr. Clark's at which she had so frequently hinted to him. This being the case, she had resolved to keep her own future movements unknown to him, in order to provide him with a pleasant and encouraging surprise.

These things being elucidated, Mr. Clark gave a flustered corroboration to her theory concerning his unannounced departure from Shorehaven, and thereafter he and the lady returned to a footing which was a thing of unspoken significances and ambiguous interpretations rather than of direct, unequivocal words. And his wonted wide cheerfulness returned to Mr. Clark, not even diminishing greatly when he remembered that somewhere in the post was a re-directed missive, containing sweets stamped with affectionate phrases, which must eventually reach Mrs. Brockway. For Mr. Clark was dwelling now in the shadow of Mr. Horace Dobb, and was confident that his shipmate's genius could ward off any untoward developments.

Mr. Joseph Tridge and Mr. Peter Lock went about their labours briskly and efficaciously, but with ever a watchful eye. Captain Peter Dutt roared and bellowed his orders to his full content, and never once failed to offer subsequent apology for so doing.

Finally, as pendant to all the foregoing, one may

take the figure of Mr. Horace Dobb, sitting in deep thought in his galley, night after night, with a moistened cloth bound about his temples, and eventually rising, with an impatient sigh, to repair to his bunk and there resume his still fruitless cogitations. . . .

And now the "Jane Gladys," after beating this way and that about the Channel at her owner's whim, was lying in harbour at Stridport. A sudden, irresistible desire of Mr. Pidgett's was responsible for his inaction. A yearning "to skip up to London," as he expressed it, "and catch them all on the hop at the works," had mastered him to such an extent that Captain Dutt had been ordered to change course at a moment's notice to put into the nearest harbour. Accordingly, Stridport had been reached during the afternoon, in excellent time for Mr. Pidgett to catch an express train for the metropolis. He promised to be back again within twenty-four hours, and enjoined the skipper to hold everything in perfect readiness to set out to sea again immediately on his return.

An hour after Mr. James Pidgett had departed, Mr. Stanley Pidgett, gloriously arrayed, came from his cabin and announced his intention of having a run round the town. Instructing his mother that there was no need to sit up and wait for him, he, too, went his way.

Five minutes later Miss Barton strolled off the boat and was heard inquiring the way to the post-office. She came back very late for tea, and after that meal set forth with her aunt to make selection from such organized entertainment as the town might offer.

The crew, accorded liberty by their captain, lost no time in making a systematic search of the streets of

Stridport, for they had visited the place before and believed they had some recollection of a house which had an automatic tap of so agreeable unreliability that, quite frequently, it went on dripping steadily into your glass long after it had measured and delivered the exact amount you had ordered.

Mr. Clark was of opinion that this admirable example of man's ingenuity was to be found at the "Saracen's Head," but Mr. Tridge inclined to the belief that they would find it at the "Golden Anchor." Mr. Lock was almost certain that the "Woolpack" would prove their correct goal, and Mr. Horace Dobb had to admit that he could not make up his mind whether it was the "Grey Mare" or the "Red Lion" that they really wanted.

In these circumstances, the obvious course was to seek each of the hostelries in turn, and this they did, though in none of them did they discover their quest. Good company and satisfactory cheer, however, they certainly found at each inn, and this softened the irksomeness of continued failure; but louder and louder, as the evening wore on, did they declare their fixed intention to press the hunt to a triumphant issue.

To that end they decided to make methodic inspection of each of the town's taverns in turn, and this programme in due time brought them to the "Man-o'-War," situated on the quayside, not a hundred yards from the "Jane Gladys." By now bootless search had reduced them to weariness, and, perceiving that the "Man-o'-War," too, employed unadvanced methods of measuring fluid, they came to querulous bickerings amongst themselves. But presently Mr. Tridge expressed a revised belief to the effect that the establishment they really sought was the "Peal o' Bells," and Mr. Lock said that he rather thought so too, now; and Mr. Dobb, after

cocking his chin and repeating the name of the inn three or four times interrogatively, announced that he was jolly well certain that Mr. Tridge was right, and that it *was* the "Peal o' Bells."

Animation awoke again, and they were all rising to seek out the "Peal o' Bells" without further delay when Mr. Clark hesitatingly mentioned his impression that the "Peal o' Bells" was situated, not in Stridport, but in Chadmouth, and to support that contention, reminded his hearers of a joyous conflict they had once had with the crew of the "Raven" at that very tavern in that very town.

And then Mr. Dobb's memory suddenly recaptured a long-forgotten incident, and brought it sharply into focus, and presented it to him. He reconstructed the incident for the benefit of his shipmates, taking them back to a distant night when the landlord of Chadmouth's "Peal o' Bells" had discovered for himself the idiosyncrasies of the automatic tap he had installed that day for the first time. Graphically he described the landlord's action of wresting the tap from its setting, convincingly he reproduced the landlord's embittered words as he hurled the tap afar through the open window. He recalled to Mr. Clark and Mr. Lock exactly where they had stood, mimicked the sad shake of the head with which Mr. Tridge had greeted the landlord's premature discovery, and repeated his own regretful comments at this abrupt termination to their hopes.

And so they were all brought to establish the truth of the reason why their search in Stridport had failed. This cleared the air, for it absolved them from the necessity of pursuing their quest farther, and, with the air of men whose responsibility has happily ended, they

turned briskly to the pleasures of the "Man-o'-War's" tap-room.

Mr. Dobb and Mr. Tridge entered on a challenge match at the dart-board with two local marksmen, and Mr. Lock furnished song and story for the entertainment of the company. But a roseate languor had descended upon Mr. Samuel Clark, so that sitting still in his chair and beaming impartially on everyone around him was fullest satisfaction for him. After awhile, though, it began to dawn on Mr. Clark that there was one gaze which met his own with something deeper and more arrestive in it than any of the others.

Time and time again Mr. Clark brought back his regard to the quiet, shabbily-dressed man in the corner, until at last he had looked at him so frequently that he felt he could now fairly claim acquaintance, wherefore he nodded to the other man and invitingly patted the empty chair beside him. With marked alacrity the individual rose and seated himself beside Mr. Clark.

And now that they were neighbours, the stout mariner cast about in his head for some friendly remark to advance, though, indeed, the stranger was already bending upon Mr. Clark a smile which must surpass in amiability anything which Mr. Clark could say.

"Off of 'Jane Gladys,' aren't you?" said the stranger.

Mr. Clark, bending his head, ran his forefinger over letters embroidered on his jersey, and nodded confirmation.

"A fine boat," declared the stranger. "I see her when she come in. A fine boat!"

"B'longs to a millionaire," pridefully returned Mr. Clark.

"Nicely fitted up inside, I'll be bound."

"Cream dee la cream," asserted Mr. Clark. "Rekerky—not 'alf!"

"Owner's aboard, of course?" said the other, carelessly.

"Gone to London on business. You know how it is with them millionaires. 'Ere to-day and gone to-morrow. 'E won't be back for a day or so. Business—London," he concluded with a sage jerking of his head at his new friend. "'E told me."

"Ah, you're well in his confidence, that I can see," said the other, and Mr. Clark smirked modestly.

"*She* ain't gone, not the missis," said the stout mariner, as further proof of his intimate knowledge of his employer's affairs. "Gone ashore to a theayter, or concert, or something."

"And a fine sight she looked, too, I'll lay," suggested the other man, jovially, "with all 'er jewels and knick-knacks blazing all over. *I* know what millionaires' wives are!"

"As it 'appens, she ain't at all that sort," returned Mr. Clark stiffly, for it struck him that the remark was lacking in due respect for one whose husband had the privilege of retaining Mr. Clark's services. "She's got jewels and what-nots—any amount of 'em—but she don't care about wearing of 'em in public. That's os—osty—osit——" Wisely he abandoned the attempt. "That's showing-off," he ended.

"I see," said the other carelessly.

"No offence took where none is meant," Mr. Clark assured him. He pondered his words after he had uttered them, and they seemed to him a little ungenial for such a snug atmosphere as the tap-room exuded. "That's all right, old chum," he therefore added. "*We* understands each other. *We* ain't going to quarrel."

"Of course we ain't!" very cordially agreed his new acquaintance. "You and me are going to get on all right. Give us your 'and."

To this Mr. Clark assented with great good-will, and while still they were shaking hands the other man spoke again.

"I suppose you couldn't manage for me to have a look round your boat?" he asked.

"Whaffor?" demanded Mr. Clark, with instant suspicion, and sharply withdrew his hand.

"Oh—curiosity!"

"Can't be did," said Mr. Clark, and sat back shaking his head for a full ten seconds.

"Righto!" accepted the other, and yawned, and then gave tepid interest to the prowess of the dart-throwers.

The yawn proved infectious, affecting Mr. Clark to the extent of three prodigious gapes, after which he came to a little space of sleepy blinkings. Gradually his chin began to droop on his chest, but the final downward movement of his head was a jerk, and this re-awakened him. Glancing round drowsily, he perceived the stranger still in the chair at his side.

"Wasn't you saying something about you'd like to go aboard the old boat?" asked Mr. Clark.

"I was," replied the other man, with covert eagerness.

"Can't be did," said Mr. Clark again, disappointingly.

He closed his eyes again, and fell to wondering how he had ever come to be talking at all to this shabby stranger. He remembered that the man had seemed to be taking a peculiar interest in him, that he had responded very quickly to a casual offer of acquaintanceship. Also, he had expressed curiosity as to the where-

abouts of Mr. Pidgett, and, further, had asked to be taken aboard the "Jane Gladys." As he reflected these things, a tiny idea shot forward from the hinder spaces of his mind, and began to turn and spin, enlarging and increasing in vividness, like a revolving firework, till there was no room in Mr. Clark's thoughts for anything else. He leaned forward and tapped the stranger's knee with an air of certainty.

"Name of Smith," he asserted.

"Yours?"

"No, yours."

"Oh!" said the stranger.

"Smith. That's it, now, ain't it?"

"P'r'aps it is, and p'r'aps it ain't," conceded the other, warily.

"*John* Smith?"

"Might be."

"A alleybi," observed Mr. Clark authoritatively.

"Maybe," agreed Mr. Smith very watchfully.

"Thought I'd 'it on the right track," said Mr. Clark complacently. "Come to me all in a flash, it did. That's all right. You needn't be frightened of *me*. Why, I've been as good as asked to keep a special look out for you."

"Who by?" asked Mr. Smith quickly. "What for?"

"Why, by 'er," responded Mr. Clark.

"And who's 'er?"

"You needn't keep it up in front of me," smiled the stout mariner. "You know 'oo I mean well enough—Miss Barton, of course!"

"Ah!" murmured the other indefinitely.

"She give me the office that she 'alf expected to see you when we sailed from Shore'aven last week. I rather guessed that you'd be dodging about somewhere

before long to try and get a word with 'er. No wonder you'd like to 'ave a look over the boat," Mr. Clark chuckled archly. "Disguise, of course?" he suggested, indicating Mr. Smith's raiment. "Jolly good idea! You don't 'alf look a low-down character! No one would ever think that you 'ad seven or eight 'undred a year of your own! Oh, you needn't look so startled at me knowing that! There ain't many things Mr. Pidgett keeps back from *me*, I can tell you."

Mr. Clark glanced towards Horace, clearly minded to acquaint him of this meeting, but both Mr. Dobb and Mr. Tridge were absorbed in a dispute with their opponents about the rules of dart-throwing. Mr. Clark then turned his attention to Mr. Lock, but that debonair sailorman was helping the landlady to wash tumblers. For a few moments Mr. Clark hesitated, being disinclined to assume sole responsibility, until the thought occurred to him that any pecuniary reward the grateful Mr. Smith might offer would have to be shared among those who had earned it.

"You come along with me," he invited Mr. Smith. "I'll take you aboard. It won't be long before she and 'er aunt are back, and then I'll drop 'er a 'int 'ow she can get a few words alone with you."

"Good enough!" said Mr. Smith tersely, and followed Mr. Clark out of the inn.

Leaving his friend in the shadows on the quay, Mr. Clark scouted forward, returning presently with the intelligence that the ladies had evidently not yet returned.

"Ain't there somewhere aboard where I can wait?" asked Mr. Smith. "It's a bit chilly 'ere."

"The saloon's locked up and so is all the cabins," Mr. Clark informed him.

"I got some keys," volunteered Mr. Smith.

"The old geezer might see you," demurred Mr. Clark. "But there's the fo'c'sle. You could make yourself comfortable down there till she comes along—the young lady, I mean."

With this suggestion Mr. Smith gratefully agreed, and two minutes later he was accorded the temporary freedom of the forecastle.

"I'll 'ang about up on deck," promised Mr. Clark. "The moment she comes aboard I'll get word with 'er some'ow. You'll be all right down 'ere. I dare say you'll be 'aving company presently. It'll be closing time in about ten minutes. But *I'm* the only one as is 'elping you, don't forget!"

"Late as that, is it?" exclaimed Mr. Smith in feigned surprise. "Well, look 'ere, there's no reason why you shouldn't cut across and have just one last one, before they shut. Here you are."

He handed Mr. Clark a coin. Ruefully Mr. Clark noted the smallness of it. As earnest of favours to come, it was not encouraging. It rather confirmed an opinion gaining ground in Mr. Clark's mind that Mr. Smith was not at all the sort of young man he would ever have imagined so charming a person as Miss Barton look on with favour. He did not blame Miss Barton, but he was very cross with Love for being blind.

However, he accepted the coin, with a polite murmur, and repairing to the "Man-o'-War" he there ingurgitated with practised rapidity, and left the inn with his companions. Outside, there was a halt, for Mr. Dobb and Mr. Tridge desired to wait for their late opponents and resume the discussion under less trammelled conditions, while Mr. Lock was instructed to

stand by in the quality of a reserve force for use in emergency.

Mr. Clark therefore returned alone towards the "Jane Gladys," and, by chance, found Mrs. Pidgett and her niece on the very gangway. Officiously Mr. Clark hastened forward to help them aboard. A few secret words to the young lady, as he assisted her, caused her to lag behind, and her aunt unlocked the saloon and tendered it alone.

"'E's turned up, miss!" excitedly whispered Mr. Clark. "Your friend, Mr. John Smith!"

"Arrived already!" she asked in surprise.

"'E's down in the fo'c'sle now, miss. All disguised up, 'e is, but I knew 'im, bless you! Hinstinct! It's a gift with me. I met 'im in the 'Man-o'-War,' and brought 'im across 'ere. 'E's in the fo'c'sle now, waiting to get a word with you."

"Oh, but you *couldn't* have met him!"

"Oh, but I *did*, miss!"

"But you *couldn't* have!" she insisted. "I know, because I—I telephoned to—to Mr. Smith from the post office here this afternoon. He was in London, and he found there was no train by which he could possibly arrive here till half-past eleven to-night."

"Well, all I know is——" began Mr. Clark slowly.

He broke off, and there was a little wait. Then, turning, the stout mariner clattered away and made a cyclonic descent into the fore-castle.

The fore-castle was empty.

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER the first douche of perplexity had spent itself, Mr. Clark, with great presence of mind, remarked, "Har, har, I see you!" and chuckled to show that he appreciated a jest. This stratagem attaining no success, his laugh abruptly perished, and he began an examination of the deeper shadows of the forecastle, with no more palpable result than a slight headache brought on by the stooping posture necessary to probe beneath Mr. Tridge's bunk.

"Well," said Mr. Clark, baffled, "that's a rum 'un. That's all I can say. It's a rum 'un."

But even so succinct a summary somehow failed to satisfy him, and still he groped for some clue to the disappearance of his new friend.

"Come aboard appupus to see 'er, admitted that 'is name was John Smith, and then goes and runs away," he fretfully murmured. "And 'er so positive it ain't 'im, too, when I see 'im with my own eyes! Just as if 'e couldn't 'ave caught a earlier train, after all! But what beats me is why, after taking all that trouble to disguise and come down 'ere, 'e should go and run away again without seeing 'er! Silly, *I* calls it. The only thing I can think is that 'e must be very shy or——"

Mr. Clark's jaw incontinently dropped open as a new and disturbing thought came to him. Hurriedly he made a search among his personal belongings, with a dismal sinking feeling that his beloved sea-boots, by their absence, would furnish the key to Mr. Smith's

strange departure. But his boots were quite safe, and a swift tally of the remainder of his personal property revealed no deficiencies. Nor, so far as he could discern, had the belongings of his shipmates been ravaged, and the only damage to them to be reported was inflicted by Mr. Clark himself in upsetting an unsuspected bottle of hair oil over some neckties adjacent to it in Mr. Horace Dobb's locker.

So at last Mr. Clark philosophically came to the conclusion that the evanishment of Mr. John Smith was but one more mystery of the sea. He therefore returned to the deck to acquaint Miss Barton of his error in stating that her friend was waiting below for opportunity to see her. That young lady, however, had now retired.

Mr. Clark, feeling a certain drowsiness stealing over him, thankfully accepted this respite from explanation and retired below again to his own rest.

A little later Captain Dutt said good-bye to some friends and, crooning softly, festooned up the gangway and along to his cabin. Three minutes after, Mrs. Brockway, clutching a concert programme as a sort of patent of respectability, came quietly aboard and went to her slumbers. After another five minutes Mr. Horace Dobb, Mr. Joseph Tridge, and Mr. Peter Lock made a tired descent into the forecastle and disposed themselves for sleep.

Peace and quiet enwrapped the "Jane Gladys." The clock in Stridport's ancient church tower chimed the hour of midnight. . . .

Mr. Stanley Pidgett, returning towards the harbour, stood still to listen to the mellow notes and to count the twelve sonorous strokes that followed. It had been an evening of interesting experiences, if not of unalloyed

pleasure, for Mr. Pidgett, junior. The hotel had certainly failed to respond adequately to the trust he had given it in ordering his dinner, but, on the other hand, the waiter had proved obsequious to the most flattering degree, and Mr. Stanley Pidgett still preferred to believe that it was some nervous affliction, and not a grin, which had marred the servitor's features at that moment when the departing guest unexpectedly turned round to nod a lofty good night.

Again, the local music hall had signally failed to uphold that fun and refinement which its advertisements promised. But, to set against this, Mr. Stanley had enjoyed the friendly overtures of some of the very brightest spirits of the town. Young auctioneers, bank clerks, and sons of flourishing tradesmen they were, and very jovial fellows, though perhaps a little inclined to be too free and easy, until Mr. Pidgett, junior, had thought it as well to inform them of his identity and status. After that they had behaved becomingly enough towards him. Indeed, it was with marked deference that a few of them invited him to patronize a little game of cards they purposed at an adjacent private dwelling-house, and their artless satisfaction when he signified his willingness had pleased him very much.

The ensuing game was bright and free from the slightest suspicion of irregular play, but Mr. Pidgett, junior, proved consistently unlucky. When at last the pastime was relinquished at the request of an irate landlady, Mr. Stanley had lost a sum which could not but redound to his dignity, though he was careful to explain that he could have lost the amount twenty times over without being at all troubled thereby.

And now he was walking home, a little relaxed after the exertions of the night, a little peevish because a

kindly host, escorting him to the door, had asked him if he were quite sure the loss of his money would not discommode him.

“Just as if a few paltry pounds——” muttered Mr. Stanley Pidgett, restively, and was half inclined to go back to argue the matter further with his host when the clock gained his attention. A little expression of surprise at the lateness of the hour left him at the dozenth stroke, and he hurried on towards the “Jane Gladys.”

He reached the dark quay and made out the dim form of his floating home. Cautiously he set foot on the gangway and began to make his way along it. He was already near the end when he stopped, and instantly he became aware of a creeping, prickling sensation at the roots of his hair, for his hand, groping along the rail of the gangway, had closed upon a sleeved arm.

Automatically he recoiled from the contact, and stood trying to pierce the blackness of the night. Indistinctly he apprehended a motionless head and shoulder against the lesser darkness of the sky.

“What—what—what——” began Mr. Stanley Pidgett, and ceased on finding that he had less authority over his lips than he believed.

And next he found himself trying to strike a match, but his fingers were stiff and strained, and the match-box trembled curiously in his hand. At last a light sputtered up, and he caught a glimpse of a white, intent face, but in that same instant the matches were dashed from his grasp and a wiry forearm caught him full across the chest.

As Mr. Pidgett, junior, staggered back, the intruder sought to slip past him down the gangway. But the blow had so disturbed Mr. Stanley’s equilibrium

that he already fancied himself hurtling over the rail into the chill water beneath, and he threw out his arms and clutched convulsively to save himself from this fate. His grasp encountered the intruder's neck, and he embraced it tightly.

"Leggo!" grunted a voice, and a fist began to hammer unavailingly on Mr. Pidgett's head.

"Help!" cried the assaulted one in a shrill falsetto voice. "H-h-help!"

So, for a space, voice and sinew contended, and then came intervention. Thudding footsteps mounted the gangway, and next a pair of strong arms encircled the contestants and held them inactive.

And now the "Jane Gladys" leaped into wakefulness. Up from the forecastle came four hurrying sailormen in curious déshabille. A short, white-garbed figure, swinging a lantern, gave the world the information that Captain Peter Dutt was still loyal to an old-fashioned form of nightwear. The lantern's rays shone on the group on the gangway, and Mr. Clark recognized the face of the individual he had sought to befriend that evening. Also he recognized the owner's son, in spite of the unusual pallor of that youth's complexion. But the third man, he who still held the other two in an unrelenting grip, was totally unfamiliar to Mr. Clark, or, indeed, to any of those present.

"What's all this about?" bawled the skipper, not without flavour of nervousness in his tones. "What's it all about, eh?"

"All a mistake," said Mr. Clark's friend hoarsely. "Got on the wrong boat. It's all right. Apologize! Must go now."

"He—he struck me!" testified Mr. Stanley, and

seemed to be the only one fully alive to the enormity of this offence. "He *struck* me!"

"All a mistake," said the other again. "Couldn't see. All dark. Lemme go. Must go now."

He tried to wriggle himself free of his captor's hold, and a muffled metallic rattling at once became audible.

"'Old 'im tight," directed the skipper. "You take one arm, Joe, and you take the other, Sam, and bring 'im right aboard. And what about you?" he asked, addressing the second stranger. "'Ow far are you concerned in this—this dastardly attack?"

"Oh, he's all right!" testified Mr. Stanley effusively. "He's a sportsman! He's one of the best! He—he rescued me!"

"Ah, lucky 'e was about then!" commented the skipper, with swift change of manner.

"It was quite by chance," remarked the new-comer. "I was just strolling round a bit and—and found myself down by the harbour here, and—and then it happened!"

And now the entire party, closely surrounding Mr. Clark's acquaintance, moved towards the saloon and made of it an informal court of justice. But, first of all, there was to be noted the fact that the door of the saloon was unlocked, and next the ladies aboard had to be assured that they had nothing to fear.

Willing hands searched the captive, and found on him silver forks and spoons and other articles of table use manufactured from the same metal. The pockets of the prisoner yielded loot, the lining of his coat confessed further spoil, and even the inner side of his boot-tops ceded their hoard.

"Lock 'im in the galley, and don't let 'im out of your

sight for a moment, Joe," ordered the skipper. "And you, Sam, keep watch outside the galley. And you, Peter, cut off for a policeman, sharp as you can."

Disposition thus made of the prisoner, the moment was ripe for thanks to be accorded to Mr. Stanley's rescuer.

"I'm dashed grateful to you," asserted Mr. Pidgett, junior. "If there's any little return I can make it's yours! And I'm sure the pater will be most fearfully obliged to you! Oh, most fearfully!"

"Well, I was wondering——"

"Come now, no need to hang back. The pater will be only too pleased, and of course, you know, he's pretty well lined, you know—what? I mean, expense——" Mr. Stanley dismissed further need to mention such a thing, flourishing his hand in rather a bored gesture.

"Well, as a matter of fact, there's one service you could do me, and I'd be greatly obliged. I happen to be—well, I'd like a job aboard here, and that's the truth."

To this there came no immediate reply, for Mr. Stanley was plainly dismayed to find that he had been talking so engagingly to one who was prepared to accept a menial position. In the circumstances, he was thinking, it would have been far more gentlemanly for the other to have accepted his thanks and taken his leave straightway. It annoyed him that he should have been led astray by the voice of this stranger. He ought, instead, to have taken greater heed of the other man's apparel, which, now that he came to look at it more closely, was distinctly nothing more than neat and serviceable.

"But, of course," said the stranger, realizing that the silence was unpromising, "you might not like to

take too much responsibility. I quite understand that you may not be in a position to engage people offhand. Perhaps, if I call again, and see the—the head of affairs, you might be prepared to put in a good word for me.”

“As it happens,” returned Mr. Stanley, loftily, “I am the head of affairs for the time being, don’t you know. The pater distinctly told you that I was boss when he was away, didn’t he, Captain Dutt?”

“That is so, sir.”

“So you see I have got enough responsibility to take you on. And, as I’ve been saying, I’m very much obliged to you for coming along as you did, though I really think I should have settled the beggar myself in another half minute. Still, if you like to turn in with the crew for the rest of the night I’ll—ah—see you in the morning, and see what can be done for you.”

“It’ll be very good of you.”

Mr. Stanley was just turning away with a yawn, to show that the interview was closed, when there arose commotion in the neighbourhood of the galley.

“Look out, Sam, ’old ’im!” bawled the voice of Mr. Tridge, and this was followed by a wail from Mr. Dobb, and the plaintive words, “Look out, Sam, you old fool, it’s *me* you’re ’itting!”

This was followed by the rush of footsteps across the deck, and again there arose an incensed bellowing from Mr. Tridge.

“Get out of the way, Sam! Don’t get falling all over the place and grabbing at folks, you damned old idjit, you!”

“There ’e goes, down the gangway!” Mr. Dobb was heard next to shout.

Racing feet clattered along the quayside. The

fiercest of objurgations came from the darkness: vivid orders directed Mr. Samuel Clark to stand out of the way and not incommode the whole of the narrow gangway with his vast bulk.

The hurrying footsteps turned away from the wharf and became fainter and fainter. There were vague, questioning shufflings to and fro about the quay, and then Mr. Tridge and Mr. Dobb, quarrelling bitterly with Mr. Clark, came back to the ship.

"'E's got away, sir!" announced Mr. Tridge savagely. "Escaped! All old Sam Clark's silly fault! 'E come and knocked at the galley door and said something what neither me nor 'Orace could 'ear, and 'e said 'e wouldn't say it louder in case the prisoner over-'eard. So we stepped out to 'im, and the prisoner slipped out and—and there was a lot of muddle and confusion, and 'e got away—clean away!"

"That's a pity," said the skipper. "There's a lot I wanted to 'ear at the police-court. How 'e got aboard, for one thing, because he must 'ave been at 'is games some while before Mr. Stanley here collared 'im, and someone would 'ave been sure to notice him looking suspicious about the place earlier in the evening."

"Oh, well, 'e's got away now, sir!" said Mr. Clark, not without satisfaction. "And I dare say it'll be for the best after all. I'm sure the owner don't want to 'ang about 'ere a week or two on police-court business."

"Well, you may be right, Sam," conceded the skipper. "I never thought of that. Besides, we've got back everything he stole, so there's no real 'arm done. After all, all's well that ends well."

"'Ear, 'ear!" fervently interrupted Mr. Clark.

"And," continued the skipper, "it certainly give our young master here a chance of showing 'is pluck. Regular 'eroic, I calls it."

"Er—well, give the hands a drink all round, captain, and then we'll get off to bed," directed Mr. Stanley.

It was during the consequent ceremony of wishing the owner's son the best of luck that Miss Barton put in an appearance. At her aunt's behest she had dressed herself and come to ask the skipper whether that lady might now safely yield herself to slumber without fear of further disturbance.

Captain Dutt gave her the fullest of reassurances to convey to Mrs. Pidgett, and these were fortified by view of the uniformed policeman who had by now arrived with Mr. Lock and seemed relieved, rather than otherwise, that his services were not required.

As she turned to go back to her aunt's cabin, Miss Barton caught full sight of Mr. Stanley Pidgett's rescuer. She stopped sharply and had almost spoken.

"This is the young chap what—what received the thief in custody from Mr. Stanley, miss," explained the skipper.

The stranger gazed at her with a certain restrained awkwardness.

"Im very glad to see you," said Miss Barton, and gave him her hand.

This struck Mr. Stanley as a quite unnecessary display of feeling.

"I shall probably give him a job on board here," he remarked pointedly.

Miss Barton bowed and went on her way.

"Oh, while I think of it," said Mr. Stanley to the stranger, "what's your name?"

"My name? Oh, why—it's—er—John Smith!"

Mr. Samuel Clark, making a choking noise, set down his glass and was led away to be assiduously patted on the back by his shipmates.

CHAPTER IX

THE crew of the "Jane Gladys," after the disturbance of the night, woke pettishly from their slumbers. For some while they lay inert, grunting their disapproval of any scheme of existence which subordinated the freedom of man to the mere mechanical promptings of a clock. This invariable portion of their daily ritual performed, they grumpily and reluctantly quitted their mattresses and began to garb themselves for duty. Their eyes were heavy lidded and their mentality was sluggish, so that it was not at once that they were reminded of the presence of a stranger in their midst, and, when presently they became aware of him, it was with an unreasonable sense of resentment because he looked so comfortable. He was lying on his back in the bunk assigned to him, with his palms beneath his head. Smoke was curling up from the pipe gripped between his teeth, and he was smiling in a quiet, satisfied way.

"You're looking very pleased with yourself, Mister blessed John blessed Smith," was Mr. Tridge's churlish observation.

"No particular reason to be otherwise," cheerfully returned the new-comer.

"'Wake up laughing, and go to bed crying,'" quoted Mr. Samuel Clark severely. "You live as long as I 'ave, if you can, and you'll find out that's true."

"Besides," said Mr. Tridge, "it ain't reasonable nor natural for a man to be merry and bright before break-

fast, and I don't like to see it neither, young feller, so there!"

"And what have you got to grin at, anyway?" sourly questioned Mr. Lock. "You don't really think you're likely to get a job aboard here, do you?"

"I shall be sorry if I don't."

"So I dare say," dryly scoffed Mr. Lock.

"Sorry for *your* sakes, I mean," amplified Mr. Smith.

"Oh, don't waste your sorrow on us!" ironically begged Mr. Lock. "We shall get over it in time. We shan't wear black crape for *you* for more than six months, I don't suppose."

"Nor sackcloth and ashes." said Mr. Clark, crinkling his nose scornfully.

Mr. Horace Dobb, ever the first of them to be sensitive to delicate significances, suddenly shed his moroseness and came alertly to Mr. Smith's bedside.

"You mustn't take any notice of them teasing you a bit, old chum," he remarked. "Bless you, they don't mean no 'arm! A joke and a bit of innocent teasing—that's us, all over. I don't mind telling you, confidential, as we've all took to you, right from the first—took to you wonderful."

"Of course we 'ave," declared Mr. Clark, plunging in at once to follow his acknowledged leader in such matters. "'Oo could 'elp it?" he asked. "A nice, bright, 'appy-'earted, plucky young chap like you."

He stooped and patted the knee of Mr. Smith, leering amicably at him. This done, he glanced at Mr. Dobb, as though for further guidance, but the cook was lighting a cigarette in a casual manner.

"By the way," said Mr. Dobb carelessly, "what was you saying just now"—he paused to emit smoke in a

nonchalant manner—"about getting a job aboard 'ere? You know, something about being sorry, for *our* sakes, if you didn't get took on."

"Well, I'd be sorry for you," replied Mr. Smith calmly and clearly, "because there'd be five pounds for each of you four if I *did* get taken on aboard here."

The effect of the announcement was electrical. Mr. Dobb, grasping at one of the new-comer's hands, shook it energetically and assured him that he could already look on the affair as being as good as settled. Mr. Lock, doffing ill-humour from his face as if it were a mask, craned over Mr. Dobb's shoulder to express smiling satisfaction with the munificence of this offer. Mr. Joseph Tridge essayed to give some indication of his gratified feelings by snatching Mr. Dobb's sou'-wester off a nail and gleefully kicking it into a corner. The ancient and obese Mr. Samuel Clark, with his *flair* for interpreting his emotions pantomimically, first turned his empty pockets inside out, and next blissfully shook hands with himself, and finally executed a few cumbersome steps in simulation of a Highland dance.

"You leave it to us, chum!" warmly recommended Mr. Tridge. "We'll see you fixed all right."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Smith. "The money will be ready and waiting the moment the thing is settled."

"And that won't be 'alf a second longer than we can 'elp," Mr. Dobb assured him. "Me and my mates will step up into the galley and talk it over soon as ever we're dressed."

"Why not talk it over now?" suggested Mr. Smith. "Naturally I'm interested, and I'd like to hear——"

"Me and my mates are a—a bit shy about speaking in public," replied the master-mind of the forecastle.

"We always gets on much better when we talks things over quiet, on our own, between just the four of us."

"Oh, right you are!" acquiesced Mr. Smith. "Just as you like. I can see you're going to do your best for me, so I shan't worry. There's just one thing," he mentioned, a little awkwardly. "I can't give any references to a previous employer."

"Well, references 'ave never been the least 'elp to me," commented Mr. Tridge encouragingly. "That I *do* know."

"Of course," said the new-comer, "I know a little about the sea. I used to handle a small boat of my own once. That," he explained very quickly, "was before I—I lost my money, of course."

"Of course," accepted Mr. Dobb, with a covert wink at his shipmates.

"'Ere, but 'old 'ard," demurred Mr. Clark in alarm. "If 'e's lost all 'is money, 'ow's 'e going to be able to 'and us out the five quid 'e's promised us?"

"Oh, that'll come out of some I had left!" said Mr. Smith.

"Besides, where's your manners, Sam—where's your manners?" reproved Mr. Dobb, bending a terrible frown on the stout seaman. "I *am* surprised at you! Fancy questioning anybody about their private affairs like that! 'E's said 'e's going to give us five pounds apiece, and I'm sure his word is as good as his bond, and that's good enough for me. And now let's get on up to my galley, and we can talk things over while you chaps help me to start my work for the day."

Accordingly, adjournment was made to Horace's domain, and here the cook, after he had thoughtfully provided work for everybody, arrogated to himself the office of chairman of the meeting.

"Well, now, let's get to business," he invited, settling himself comfortably on a corner of the table. "Ain't everything shaping together nice? Ain't it all bound to lead to something very extry special before we've finished?"

"I ain't selling any of *my* shares in 'Orace & Co.,' any'ow," testified Mr. Tridge.

"A millionaire for a owner, and our own sort of private Santy Claus in the fo'c'sle," remarked Mr. Lock gleefully. "I reckon that's quite enough to fill anyone with what foreigners calls, for some reason or other, *joy de vivree*."

"Oh, well, they can't 'elp being iggerant!" tolerantly excused Mr. Tridge, for the auspicious start of the day had made him jubilant enough to forgive anybody for anything.

"Ah, and they *are* iggerant, too!" corroborated Mr. Clark. "I remember once asking a Frenchy something in Boolong, and 'e never even begun to understand me, even though I asked 'im the question over and over again, at the very top of me voice. In the end 'e abs'lutely run away, 'e did! And then again, once, over in Cally, I wanted some needles and thread—it was about the time when they used to keep a watch-dog on the 'Vivid,' you may remember—and I went into a shop——"

"*'Magazeens,'* they calls 'em," volunteered the erudite Mr. Lock.

"Never mind what they *calls* 'em!" retorted Mr. Clark. "It was a shop, just the same, and in I goes, and asks for what I wants, quite civil, there being a gal be'ind the counter, but do you think I could ever get 'em to——"

"We ain't come 'ere to talk about your past life,

Sam," interrupted Mr. Dobb. "There's been too much of it, for one thing, and, for another, we've got something much more important to talk about."

"All the same," said Mr. Clark, not to be immediately suppressed, "they 'ad to go out and fetch a kind of p'liceman to me, in the end. "'E'd got a sword and——"

"Now about this here John Smith, as 'e calls 'imself," struck in Horace.

"But I didn't come away empty-'anded," pridefully maintained Mr. Clark. "I'd got three pincushions and a bunch of artificial flowers in my pockets when I come out. Got 'em while they was waiting for the p'liceman to arrive."

"This here John Smith, as he calls himself," insistently repeated Mr. Dobb.

"Ah, but that ain't 'is real name, though," pointed out Mr. Clark.

"Well, we all know that well enough," impatiently returned Mr. Dobb. "We all know his real name as well as you do. It's—it's—er—it's——"

"Cliff—Cliff something - or - other Somebody," prompted Mr. Clark helpfully. "When Mr. Pidgett let the name slip that morning, the Cliff part, any way, stuck tight in me mind."

"Well, it stuck in mine, too, when *you* told *me*," said Mr. Dobb. "Because it reminded me at once of Cliftonville, near Margit, where I once spent a day with a young party, when I 'ad more money than sense."

"Oh, well, what the rest of 'is name may be, don't so much matter!" contended Mr. Tridge. "The big thing is that we're pretty safe in recognizing 'im as the young feller Miss Barton's in love with."

"Quite romantic, ain't it?" said Mr. Clark.

"I've paid good money to see sillier things on the moving pickchers," admitted Mr. Dobb. "He's trying to get a job on the boat to be near 'er. When 'e's married to 'er 'e may try to get a job on a boat for the very hopposite reason, same as I did."

"And 'e's calling 'imself 'John Smith,' so as the owner won't know 'im," put in Mr. Clark acutely. "Mr. Pidgett ain't ever seen 'im, nor 'ave any of 'em except Miss Barton, so 'e's quite safe."

"Well, and we're not to let 'im know that we know who 'e really is, neither," Mr. Dobb warned his shipmates. "It'll be killing the goose with the golden eggs if we do."

"'Ow's that?" inquired Mr. Tridge. "I should 'ave thought it would 'ave 'elped us to put the screw on 'im a bit."

"Oh, we'll put the screw on 'im all right when the time comes," shamelessly promised Mr. Dobb. "But for the present we don't know nothing. It'll pay us better, because a young chap in love don't take no heed of money."

"Otherwise," sapiently argued Mr. Clark, "'e wouldn't be in love."

"Five quid apiece to 'elp 'im to a job!" rhapsodized Mr. Tridge. "That proves 'ow deep 'e is in love, don't it? Why, in the old days, a couple of pints apiece would have done the trick. It shows you 'ow dead keen 'e is."

"For meself," mentioned Mr. Clark, "I like 'elping folks who don't mind hadmitting that they appreciates your 'elp."

"First we 'elps 'im to a job and pockets five quid apiece," sketched Mr. Dobb. "Then, one day, 'e'll ad-

mit, either by accident or apurpose, that 'e ain't really John Smith, and 'e'll give us another little bonus to keep it dark. And then 'e'll tell us 'ow 'e's in love with Miss Barton, and 'e'll promise us another nice slice of spondulick pudden to 'elp 'im to get 'er. And then, after that, we can always be touching 'im for a bit, one way or another, putting up fresh ideas to 'im, and so forth. A chap with 'is income is bound to 'ave a nice little bit of capital to draw on."

"Oh, he's going to be a regular little goldmine to us," happily prophesied Mr. Tridge. "Why, you'd 'ear my 'eart go crack like a pistol if he didn't get took on aboard 'ere now."

"'E'll be took on all right," asserted Mr. Dobb with all confidence.

"'Ow's it to be worked?" asked Mr. Tridge.

Mr. Dobb raised his forefinger and tapped impressively of his temple.

"The old incubator is warming up nicely," he announced. "It's just on boiling point!"

He nodded reassuringly and made a gesture which enjoined silence for the encouragement of fecund thought.

CHAPTER X

THE elegant Mr. Stanley Pidgett, thrusting back his chair a little way from the breakfast-table, lighted a cigarette with indolent grace, and insincerely affected an air of modesty by scrutinizing his immaculate finger nails.

His mother, on the farther side of the ornate coffee-urn, was sedulously eating toast and marmalade, but without for a moment allowing her admiring gaze to stray from the countenance of her splendid son; nor did she permit the exigencies of mastication to preclude the utterance of such remarks as her maternal pride compelled her to voice.

The vacant seat at the third side of the table gave reminder of the absence in London of Mr. Pidgett, senior, and the fourth place was occupied by Miss Barton. A certain apprehensive self-suppression marked the demeanour of that young lady, a nervous watchfulness which expressed itself in broken sentences, and in sudden, but brief, concentrations of interest upon her breakfast, and in rather fearful peeps along the deck through the open doorway of the saloon.

And, ministrant in the background, Mrs. Brockway, the stewardess, nodded a respectful, sycophantic agreement with all that Mrs. Pidgett was saying, and yet betrayed private mental reservations by tight-folded corners to lips and a suggestion of veiled scepticism in her eyes whenever she glanced at the complacent, lounging figure of Mr. Stanley Pidgett.

"Your pa *will* be proud of you, Stan!" the owner's

wife prophesied for the tenth time since the meal had begun.

Mr. Stanley smiled down his nose, and flicked the ash from his cigarette into his empty cup.

"Heroic, *I* call it," roundly asserted his doting mother. "Fancy tackling a burglar like that, and all in the dark, too! Even *I* could never have believed it of you," she admitted with candour. "I can hardly even believe it now. What your pa will say when 'e 'ears——"

"Oh, shut up, mater!" ambiguously murmured Stanley.

"There's lots of people got medals for less braver things," insisted Mrs. Pidgett. "O.B.E's, and things. I dare say *you're* entitled to a medal, if the truth was only known. We must ask your pa. If anyone can pull the strings for one, 'e can. Fancy arresting a desperate burglar in the dark! Don't you think it's as brave as anything you ever heard of, Nora?"

"I—I beg your pardon, aunt!" exclaimed Miss Barton, guiltily ceasing to peer out at the deck. "I—I was——"

"Ah, my poor dear child, you're still shook up by them dreadful happenings last night!" declared Mrs. Pidgett compassionately. "You seem quite scared and anxious even now. Why, you keep looking through the door as if you half expected to see him on the deck."

"See—see *him*?" fluttered the girl. "Yes, I—oh! you mean the burglar? Oh, no, I'm not frightened *now*, aunt! I'm quite all right again, really I am!"

"It's a mercy we had someone to protect us," said Mrs. Pidgett. "Fancy, all in the dark! Brave as brave, *I* call it. Don't you, Nora? Tackling a savage, desperate burglar like that."

"It was tremendously brave of him, I think," agreed Nora fervently.

Mr. Stanley, affecting coyness at this tribute, snickered fatly and made bashful, protesting noises.

"How he could have had the courage, all in the dark!" marvelled his adoring mother.

"It was real bravery," observed Miss Barton, colouring prettily.

The splendid Stanley raised his eyes to her, plainly appreciative of, and encouraged by, such praise. He had something of the aspect of a misunderstood prince coming into belated possession of his kingdom.

"I'm sure if it hadn't been for Stanley's pluck——" began Mrs. Pidgett.

"Stanley?" blankly ejaculated Miss Barton. "Oh, I thought you were talking about——about the other man!"

"Him!" exclaimed Stanley. "*He* didn't have much to do with it. It was practically all over before he got there. I've been telling you——"

"Oh, but surely he came to your rescue!" said the girl spiritedly. "That's what I understood last night."

"Not a bit of it!" denied Stanley, with irritation. "He hindered far more than he helped. Pity he came at all, really. If it hadn't been for him interfering——"

"Yes?" asked Miss Barton coldly.

"Well, I mean he did his best, and all that sort of thing," replied her cousin, a little constrainedly, "but, really——what I mean to say is——really, I didn't actually *need* his help"—he paused—"after all, I—I'd already knocked his revolver out of his hand and——"

"Revolver?" cried Mrs. Pidgett, aghast. "That's the first I've heard talk of a revolver!"

"It's the first I've heard of it, too," said the girl.

"Well, there was a revolver, see," affirmed Stanley, speaking on a defiant note.

"What your pa'll say——" exclaimed Mrs. Pidgett, showing a tendency to indulge in vain repetition. "A revolver! Fancy!"

"Fancy!" echoed Nora, and her pronunciation made the words sound less like amazement than like cynical assertion.

"I didn't mention it," said Stanley, after a short pause devoted to examination of the tip of his cigarette, "because I—I didn't want to alarm you. I—yes, he had a revolver, and I knocked it out of his hand as soon as I saw it——"

"In the dark," tonelessly mentioned Nora.

"It—it *gleamed*. And I knocked it out of his hand, and it fell into the water."

"Well, what your pa will say to *that*!" breathed Mrs. Pidgett.

"That reminds me, that johnny—the one who interfered—wants a job aboard here," remarked Stanley, delicately turning the talk.

Miss Barton bent her head over her plate.

"Queer sort of chap," described Stanley. "Bit of a bounder, I should say."

Miss Barton raised her head, opened her lips to speak, and then looked down again.

"Out of work," continued Stanley. "Bit fishy, I thought. Talks all right, looks all right, for that sort of chap. Bit of a wrong 'un, if you ask me: bad egg, and all that sort of thing. We don't want him here, anyway. I'll break the news to him, and drop him ten bob. Dare say it'll be a godsend to him. He'll find plenty of pubs handy. He'll soon get over his

disappointment. In fact, I thought it was rather cheek him asking to be taken on."

"But if he wants work very badly——" suggested Mrs. Pidgett. "Suppose you ask Captain Dutt what he thinks about it, Stan, dear."

"Oh, no!" he replied definitely. "He's not at all the sort of chap we want aboard here. I'll give him the tip to clear out straightway. I'll go along and see him now, while I think of it."

He stood erect, yawned, and sauntered out on to the deck. Miss Barton, rising quickly from her chair, went a few paces in pursuit of him, then halted uncertainly and returned to the saloon.

"I think I'll go and lie down again, aunt," she said tremulously, and passed to her cabin.

Stanley, strolling royally towards the forecastle, automatically registered with his eyebrows a lofty surprise at having his progress impeded by a mere common member of the ship's crew, for the aged and portly Mr. Samuel Clark, shambling hastily forward from some post of observation, had travelled full into the orbit of the owner's splendid son and there had halted.

"Beg your pardon, sir," remarked Mr. Clark, "but I'd like to 'ave a little chat with you for 'alf a second."

Mr. Stanley stared offendedly at this presumptuous aspiration, but the rubicund face of Mr. Clark urgently radiated a stern excitement, and, impressed by this, the august youth distantly accorded the stout mariner permission to explain himself.

"That chap down in the fo'c'sle, sir," began Mr. Clark, mysteriously. "Do you know 'oo 'e is?"

"How should I?" haughtily returned Stanley.

"Ah! I thought you mightn't," observed Mr. Clark.

"Let me tell you this, though, sir, 'e ain't what you think 'e is."

"Oh?" inquired the other, languidly.

"No!" said Mr. Clark, and portentously nodded his head for some moments at Stanley.

"Well, what about him?" asked the youth at length.

"*Halleybys, in cogs*, whatever you like to call 'em!" whispered Mr. Clark tensely, and stood back to note the effect of these revelations.

"I don't follow," frowned Stanley. "What do you mean?"

"'John Smith,' 'e calls 'imself, but that ain't 'is real name. 'E only does that for pertence. That's to throw dust in your eyes."

"Do you mean he's a—a convict? Something of that sort?"

"Oh, no, sir!" disclaimed Mr. Clark. "Far from it."

"Then what *do* you mean?" demanded Stanley.

"Hangel hunawares, more like," said Mr. Clark.

"Oh, I give it up!" petulantly exclaimed the exalted one, and would have moved on, had not Mr. Clark interposed his stature.

"I think you *ought* to know about 'im, sir. What 'e is, in a manner of speaking, is a mystery. 'E's a mystery to them what do know 'im, and 'e's a mystery to them what don't know 'im."

Mr. Clark cautiously peered about him, and then, raising his palm, whispered sibilantly behind it towards Stanley.

"Oh, speak louder, man!" crossly requested that youth. "I never heard a word."

"Markiss's son!" repeated Mr. Clark, with more distinctness.

"What?" ejaculated Stanley. "Oh, don't be a damn fool!"

"Fact!" solemnly asseverated Mr. Clark.

"But—but what marquis—which marquis? . . . Oh, you're talking bally rot!"

"Begging your pardon, sir," protested Mr. Clark, with dignity, "I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing."

"But—but——"

"I don't ask you to take my word, sir. Luckily there's others aboard can bear out what I say. All I know is that I've seen this 'ere John Smith, as 'e calls 'isself, at other ports before to-day. Mind you, I didn't know 'oo 'e was special, but I couldn't 'elp noticing 'im, on account of the lovely steam-yacht 'e owned, and all the servants rushing round to do what 'e told 'em."

"Don't talk such rot! You're making some mistake. You must have noticed someone else very like him. Why on earth should a man like that want a job——"

"Ah! that I couldn't tell you, sir. Whether 'e's quarrelled with 'is father or not, that I couldn't say. All I do know is that 'e's the swell I've seen many a time on 'is own steam-yacht, and that I'll take my affidavit to!"

For some while Stanley stroked his glossy locks in deep perplexity.

"Oh, you're talking through your blessed hat!" he impatiently decided at last.

"Oh, no, I ain't, sir! I know what I'm talking about. And I know that 'e's a markiss's son, too, because Peter Lock 'imself told me. Beyond that I do admit I know nothing."

"And how does Lock think he knows?"

"Why, Peter used to be a indoor servant, sir, one time, second footman, or something, to ever so many of the nobs, sir."

"Oh, the whole thing is impossible!" declared Stanley, "of course it is! Damn nonsense. . . . However, send Lock to me."

Mr. Clark departed, walking, for some abstruse psychological reason, very softly and carefully.

Mr. Pidgett, junior, left alone, mused almost fretfully over what he had been told. It irked him to have to decide that there could be no truth in these tidings. He wished that Mr. Clark's statement could be true, for he was quick-witted enough to perceive the prestige to be secured by having the son of a marquis among one's boat-crew, whatever the circumstances that established the engagement.

The fact could be alluded to casually at gatherings. It could be made the basis of satisfactory bets with sceptical acquaintances. Indeed, tactfully handled and exploited, it might develop into a tremendous aid to social advancement. Suppose, cogitated Stanley, this stranger really were a scion of aristocracy who had quarrelled with his father? One day the breach might be healed, and then gratitude would be shown for kindly treatment in the past. Almost certainly there would be a week-end invitation to stay at the ancestral home. The visit might be repeated again and again, leading to presence at shooting parties, hunting——

Mr. Pidgett, junior, with a sigh, turned away from contemplation of this bright mirage, but still cherished a lingering spark of hope that fortune might, after all, prove unexpectedly generous.

Mr. Horace Dobb, that inconspicuous setter of nets, was seldom at fault in his choice of the lures with which he drew his quarry to entanglement.

"Peter's gone ashore for the letters, sir," announced Mr. Clark, returning.

"I see," said Stanley uncertainly. "I see. Well,

send him to me the moment he comes back. Of course, I'm sure you're making a big mistake, but——"

"The proof of the pudding, sir," reminded Mr. Clark, with reproachful loftiness, "is in the heating thereof."

Stanley, going back to the saloon, dragged out a chair, and occupied it with spectacular ease and dignity, and presently Mr. John Smith emerged from the forecastle and approached him.

"Good morning," said Mr. Smith. "Hope you won't mind me intruding on you, but I was a bit anxious to hear whether you'd decided to give me a job or not."

"I haven't made up my mind yet," answered Stanley, carefully lighting a fresh cigarette.

"Oh, well, I'll hope for the best! I think you'll find me useful, if you've got any sort of vacancy."

"Know anything about the sea?" asked Stanley.

"Oh, knocked about a bit, you know—knocked about a bit."

"Got any papers?"

"Well, no, I haven't."

"You've served as an A.B. before, of course?"

"Well, no, I haven't," said Mr. Smith again. "At least—well, not *exactly* as an A.B., you know."

Mr. Pidgett, junior, noted the faintest trace of embarrassment on the other man's face, and the tiny spark of hope within him glowed a little brighter.

"Well, what experience *have* you got?" he asked.

Mr. Smith replied, rather vaguely, that he had had a good deal, of different sorts, at different times.

"Ever had anything to do with steam-yachts?" asked Stanley.

"Well, I—I've been on them," said Mr. Smith, a little puzzled by the query.

"Oh, you have?" remarked Stanley, well pleased with his diplomacy. "Which ones have you been on?"

"Oh, several," returned the other evasively. "But—but this is a sailing ship, isn't it?"

"Oh, quite!" said Stanley. "I was only wondering if you knew anything at all about steam-yachts, that's all. Well, now, look here, what references could you give us?"

"I'm afraid that presents a difficulty. There isn't anyone to whom I could refer you."

"But surely there must be *someone*——"

"I prefer not to supply any names," stated Mr. Smith.

"Bit—ah!—peculiar, isn't it?"

"Possibly."

"Let me see, you told me your name was Smith, didn't you?—John Smith, I think you said?"

"John Smith."

"And—and—ah!—is that your *real* name?"

"It's the name I'm prepared to answer to," returned the other doggedly, and trying to look as if he were unaware that his complexion had taken on a vivid glow.

"But, I say, all this is so bally mysterious, and all that sort of thing, you know," commented Stanley. "Where do you come from, anyway? London?"

"As a rule."

"Been pretty well educated, and that kind of thing?" suggested Stanley. "I mean, the way you talk, and so forth, and so on."

"My parents did give me a pretty decent education," gravely admitted Mr. Smith. Then his eyes suddenly twinkled. "I hope that won't stand in my way?"

"But can't you tell me something more about yourself?"

"Well, I've never stolen anything, and I'm sober and industrious, and—and willing, and——. Seem to be talking like my own epitaph, don't I?" he broke off. "Sorry!"

"Well, look here, as man to man, and all that sort of thing, why *don't* you tell us just who you are?"

"For my own private reasons."

"You don't wish to be recognized?"

"No, I don't!" emphatically admitted Smith.

"I see," murmured Stanley, and glanced at the other through narrowed eyelids. "But suppose you've been recognized already?"

"Eh!" exclaimed the startled Smith.

"Oh, you needn't get the wind up!" soothed Stanley, covering what he imagined to be a tactical blunder. "I was only suggesting the idea. Who and what you are is of no particular interest to us, of course, don't you know. Absolutely not! I mean—ah, there's Lock with the letters! I want to speak to him about something. Stay where you are—I'll come back."

A swelling satisfaction was in him as he strolled away. Not only could he highly commend himself for the delicate way his diplomacy had conducted the catechism of the new-comer, but also he could find the greatest encouragement to his hopes in the stubborn elusions of the replies he had elicited.

And the soi-disant Smith, quite unaware of the nature of the crew's efforts on his behalf, was puzzled by the tone of the interview, and felt like a neophyte on the tight-rope whose relief at finding he can keep his balance is tempered by the knowledge that he still has the remainder of the journey to accomplish.

"Oh, Lock!" said Stanley, to that trim and personable sailorman, "a word with you."

"Sir, to you," returned Mr. Lock, with a polite flourish of his palm.

"Tell me, do you—ah—do you recognize that chap I've just been talking to?"

"I do, sir," stated Mr. Lock.

"Do you know who he is?"

"I do, sir. I know him as well as you do, sir."

"As well as *I* do?" involuntarily queried Stanley.

"Well, sir," explained Mr. Lock, "you belonging to the aristocratical world, you're bound to know him, friendly like. You're bound to have met him frequently at the swell clubs, and operas and balls and things where you aristocratical gents go. Of course, I've only been a servant when I've seen him before, but *you* must have come across him many a time as an equal, sir. He belongs to all the best clubs, sir, he does, same as you do yourself, of course."

"Of course," agreed Stanley slowly, concealing gratification in this flattery. "But I—I don't *seem* to remember him. One goes about," he added, with assumption of boredom, "one goes here and there, and, as it were, everywhere, but one can't remember everything or everybody, can one?"

"Not a busy man-about-town like you can't, sir," agreed Mr. Lock. "The last time I see him, myself, was when I was footman at the Duke o'—well, I won't give no names, sir, and I'm sure you'll admit I'm right. Discretion, sir—that's *my* specialty."

"Oh, quite!" said Stanley.

"Anyway, he used to come to all the big parties there—two or three years ago that was. Then, when I was in service with—with another aristocratical family, he was a regular visitor there. I think that's where I first see *you*, sir," ventured Mr. Lock.

"I dare say," carelessly conceded Stanley, but showed no desire to dwell on the point. "Funny thing," he said. "I *do* seem to remember him, but I can't remember the johnny's name at the moment."

"The Honorable Claude Worthing, sir," supplied Mr. Lock, in a respectful whisper. "Father's the Markiss o' Brighton, sir."

"Of course, of course!" exclaimed Stanley. "Ah, *now* I remember him!"

"I thought you would, sir," remarked Mr. Lock, with a strange, gleaming smile. "Dare say you remember now, sir, the stir it made in high society when he quarrelled with his father."

Stanley pursed his lips and nodded as one to whom the intimate life of the aristocracy is an open book.

"The markiss was furious, sir. Turned him out-doors."

"So I heard," hardily returned Stanley.

"They ain't spoke for over a year now. The old gent wants to patch up the quarrel, but the young 'un won't. A mass of pride, that's what he is. Independent! Earns his own living, best as he can. Let me see, didn't he say something about wanting a job last night, sir?"

"Yes, I—I've half-promised him one."

"Do you think he recognized you as one of his club-mates, sir? I don't think he could have, otherwise he's so proud and—— I wouldn't mind laying a bit that you and him have had sprees together before now, sir, arm-in-arm down the West End."

Stanley, with some histrionic skill, permitted himself a reticent smile.

"Perhaps he's hoping you won't recognize *him*, sir.

Wonder how he come to be here? Down and out, I dare say."

"By the way," said Stanley, "what did he quarrel with the Marquis about?"

"A young lady, sir, so I always understood. He was very set on marrying some young lady he'd met, and his father had other views for him, as they say."

"And did he marry her?"

"Still engaged to her, I fancy, sir. Anyway, we was pumping him a bit in the fo'c'sle at breakfast, and he told us he hoped to be getting married before long."

A lingering shade of hesitation quitted Stanley's brow. From the back of his mind was banished a disquieting little question as to how the presence of a prepossessing scion of nobility would react on his own position with Miss Barton.

"I see!" said Stanley, and began to move away.

"By the way, sir," solicitously said Mr. Lock, "I do hope you won't get the idea that I'm not reliable or to be trusted. I mean, telling you so much about people where I've been employed. After all, I shouldn't have said nothing if you hadn't known all about him already."

"Oh, quite!" graciously returned Stanley.

"It isn't as if I didn't tell you nothing you didn't know before," urged Mr. Lock.

"Exactly," said Stanley. "That's all right, Lock."

He was strolling back to Smith when, for the second time that morning, a member of the crew had the temerity to claim his attention by arrestive methods. Mr. Horace Dobb, who had been closely watching the course of events through a window, now came hurriedly from his galley and waved a dishcloth to secure Stanley's heed.

"When I went along this morning to fetch the milk for breakfast, sir——" he began.

"Oh, hang the milk!" irritably cried Stanley. "I'm busy, man—fearfully busy! If it's anything to do with the food, you must see my mother about it."

"It ain't food, sir. It's a bit of a queer yarn I heard, sir. Far as I can make out, it's about *that* chap," said Horace, nodding at Smith. "At least, I think it is. On the other 'and, it might not be. That's to say——"

Irascibly requested by Stanley to abstain from superfluous speech, Horace embarked straightway into narration.

Briefly he described a visit he had made that morning to the nearest dairy, where, while awaiting his turn to be served, he had entered into casual conversation with another maritime customer. It seemed that this latter gentleman had something akin to society gossip to relate, and, practically without invitation, had lavished it on Horace. The information thus received was now breathlessly passed on by the cook of the "Jane Gladys" to the owner's son.

"Found out 'oo 'e was, sir, quite by haccident," wound up Horace, "after 'e'd been belonging to their crew for three months and more. And, late last night, they spoke to 'im straight out about 'is 'igh birth, and 'e was so annoyed at being discovered that 'e just threw up 'is job, there and then, and wouldn't come back to 'em again at no price."

"Well, I don't care *who* he is," declared Stanley, "if a chap wants a job here, and he's the right sort, he can have a job. And I've promised Smith a job. And, since he wants to be called Smith, we'll call him Smith,

and there's not the slightest need to let him know we know otherwise."

"Ah, you've got a kind, charitable heart, sir!" observed Horace. "I guessed you wouldn't let 'im go without giving him a chance."

When Mr. Pidgett, senior, returned from London at midday, his son and heir swiftly bore him off to secrecy in the saloon. Mr. Pidgett, senior, emerged from that conversation in an extremely affable frame of mind, and, before summoning Smith to his presence, approbatively patted Stanley on the back a great number of times.

"My son tells me 'e's—he's taken you on board 'ere as one of the crew," said Mr. Pidgett, when presently, he called Smith to him. "I hope you'll get on all right and prove worthy of his kindness. At the same time," he added, "if there's anything you don't like in your treatment aboard 'ere, or anything in reason you'd like altered, don't you be afraid to come to me about it, young man!"

"Pa!" cried Mrs. Pidgett, returning from a stroll ashore, "'ave you 'eard—oh, bother!—'oo cares? I'm *that* excited! 'Ave you 'eard about young Stan and the burglar? What you'll say——"

"You can go back to the rest of the crew now," said Stanley, hurriedly, to Smith.

Mrs. Pidgett's voice rose in tones of high emotional stress as Mr. Smith turned away to go below to his new comrades. His final glimpse of Mr. Pidgett, as he descended into the fore-castle, revealed that autocrat listening with wondering incredulity to the torrent of eager news issuing from the lady's lips.

Smith's first act was to shake hands ecstatically with each of the four seamen in turn. His next was to produce wealth and make good his promise to his future colleagues.

"Though exactly how it's been worked," he admitted, "beats me. Anyway, you can bet *I'm* satisfied!"

"Ah! there's lots of things 'appen what no one can tell 'ow we've worked 'em," said Horace. "Don't you ever 'esitate to come to us when you wants another bit of 'elp. *We* can do things!" he boasted. "Like chess-players, we are. We keep moving our men, bit by bit, and then, all at once, soon as we're ready, it's our game!"

"That's it," agreed Mr. Clark. "Always a-moving the pieces forrard, we are. *You're* another piece we've moved forrard. Ain't that so, boys?"

Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock replied that this was, indeed, so; but Mr. Horace Dobb was quick to explain that if Mr. Smith had been moved forward, it was solely and entirely for his own good.

"Why, of course!" said Mr. Clark. "'Oose else good do you think it *could* be for?"

CHAPTER XI

THE "Jane Gladys," brought-to for the week-end in the fashionable resort of Tormouth, lay lapped in the luxurious inertia of Sunday afternoon.

The owner and his relations had withdrawn their august presences. Mr. James Pidgett had been bitten by a desire to advertise to all beholders his perfect right and ability to indulge in Sybaritism if he chose, and, to that end, he had borne off his wife and niece to temporary residence in that immense hotel on the esplanade whose austere splendours so quickly reduced to life-size the owners of even the largest motor-cars. And Mr. Stanley Pidgett, remaining to sleep on board the "Jane Gladys" till a late hour, had at length gone off, brilliantly garbed, and with his narrow frame bowed down beneath the weight of a vast and wonderfully varied collection of golfing implements.

Down in the forecastle Mr. Peter Lock was hopefully prospecting among the headlines of a Sunday newspaper. Mr. Horace Dobb, with a pen in his hand and a blank sheet of notepaper before him, was posed for authorship, and, indeed, had been thus posed for twenty minutes past. Mr. Samuel Clark and Mr. Joseph Tridge drowsed in their bunks, and Mr. John Smith was in supine enjoyment of a book he had scandalized his shipmates by purchasing the night before at its published price.

"Oh, what's the good?" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Dobb, sitting back. "If I *do* write to my missis she'll

only read it and be done with it. Whereas, if I *don't* write to her, she'll keep expecting to hear from me, and that'll make her think of me far more often than she would if I wrote to her."

"Besides," remarked Mr. Lock helpfully, "what have you got to tell her, special?"

"Why, nothing!"

"But perhaps you're going to send her a postal order?" suggested Mr. Lock.

Mr. Dobb obliquely replied by requesting his shipmate not to be a distinctly-specified kind of fool.

"Very well, then!" said Mr. Lock. "Why write?"

"Exactly!" accepted Mr. Dobb, and forthwith jettisoned his intents on correspondence. "Thank goodness that's done with! It's been a weight on my mind all day. And I should 'ave had to borrow a stamp anyway."

"Ah! we did have a pretty good evening last night," acquiesced Mr. Lock.

"And yet there's some fellers says Devonshire cider is a teetotal drink," remarked Horace.

"And so it may be," reasonably contended Mr. Lock, "if you don't go putting a drop of spirits in with it every time."

"Well, you don't suppose I was going to give anybody half a chance to go round saying they saw me having teetotal drinks, do you?" returned Mr. Dobb. "Besides, it's chilly stuff, cider is, and I like to be careful."

"It warmed up old Sam all right, anyhow," stated Mr. Lock. "Remember him stopping that tram to ask the driver where his starboard light was?"

"That was Joe done that," sleepily murmured Mr. Clark, opening one eye.

"So it was," agreed Mr. Lock. "It was you what bought the cod's head off of the barrow, though."

"Did I?" questioned Mr. Clark in surprise. "What for, I wonder?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. Lock. "You said it reminded you of someone. You gave it to a railway-porter in the end—gave him that and eightpence, you did."

"I did?" challenged Mr. Clark, now wide awake. "What for?"

"Why, you said you couldn't think what else to do with the blessed thing, now you'd got it."

"Strikes me," remarked Mr. Clark with asperity, "you chaps allowed me to be a blessed sight too free with my money!"

He lay still a little while in rankling thought.

"No wonder I ain't got a single penny left in me pockets to-day!" he complained bitterly at last.

"You can't eat your cake and have it too, Sam," Mr. Lock philosophically reminded him.

"But I didn't eat it," denied Mr. Clark. "Far as I can see, I went about all over the place, giving it to blessed railway porters. A nice state of affairs! Pen-niless in a strange town, and with all the evening coming on, too!"

He struggled up on one elbow and gazed at Horace.

"No good doing the despairing porpuss act at *me*, Sam," Mr. Dobb informed him. "I'm in the same boat as you. Spent clean out!"

"Same here!" Mr. Lock made haste to affirm.

Mr. Clark twisted himself to regard tentatively the sleeping form of Mr. Joseph Tridge. Recognizing the futility of any appeal in that direction, he transferred his attention to the fifth person present.

"And what sort of a time did *you* have last evening, chum, after you left us?" he asked in honeyed accents. "Enjoyed yourself all right, I do 'ope. 'Ear what I'm saying, Mr. Smith? I'm 'oping you 'ad a pleasant evening ashore last night."

"Eh!" exclaimed Smith, looking up from his book.

"I was saying I 'oped you 'ad a good time ashore last evening."

"I? Oh, not so bad! I had a bit of shopping to do, you know. First chance I've had since we left Stridport."

"Ah, I remember you buying a shirt or two and some socks and things in a 'urry, just before we sailed," recalled Mr. Clark. "I should 'ave thought they'd 'ave lasted you the fortnight all right."

"Not quite."

"You ought to 'ave brought some things with you in a bag when you joined us. You wouldn't 'ave to go spending your money then."

"Well, I didn't know I was going to join you. I—I came away from London in rather a hurry that evening, and I didn't have time to pack anything. However, I believe I'm fixed up all right now for a good while."

"If that there porkmanker is full of noo things you ought to be fixed up for the rest of your life," rejoined Mr. Clark crisply. "Bit of a spendthrift, I'm afraid you must be. S'pose there was a wreck? S'pose you fell overboard and got drowned?"

"Perhaps I did buy rather more than I need have done," ceded Mr. Smith. "There was rather a good outfitter's shop still open on the sea-front. He tempted me, and I fell. I'm pretty well stoney broke till I—till I get a letter I'm expecting, at all events."

"Oh!" said Mr. Clark, shortly, and with a certain antagonism.

"However," added Mr. Smith, shrugging down comfortably to his book again, "*I'm* not worrying."

"There's a nice thing!" audibly grumbled Mr. Clark. "All the lot of us 'ard up, and we don't sail till to-morrow evening!"

"It isn't the first time it's been like this in this fo'c'sle, Sam," Mr. Lock reminded him, tranquilly.

"That ain't nothing to do with it!" retorted Mr. Clark. "There ain't no call for it to be like that *now*! Pity some folks are so dressy that they can't leave a bit over for hemergencies, that's all *I've* got to say. And them 'aving a real easy time, too, with the owner taking a fancy to 'em, for some reason or other, and treating 'em as civil and polite as if they was equals! And then ignoring the—the little wants of them chaps what made 'is path easy for 'im! That ain't my idea of fair play!"

"Shut up, you stoopid old grampuss!" directed Horace, with a repressive shake of his head at the plump malcontent. "Didn't our pal here give us five quid 'apiece, like a true gent, for 'elping 'im to get the job?"

"Why, so 'e did," admitted Mr. Clark, a little abashed.

"And then you go mumbling and growling about 'im like that! I'm ashamed of you; I am really! Do you think that's a fitting reward for 'is generosity? Do you think it likely to encourage him ever to do us a kindness again? You ought to think twice before you speak, Sam, you ought really!"

"All right, I'm sorry," contritely apologized Mr. Clark.

"Yes," warmly continued Mr. Dobb, "and if he *has* had a nice, easy time of it, with everyone speaking smooth and civil to him, even them in the saloon, I'm *glad* of it, I *am*! If the owner chooses to treat 'im special polite, what's it got to do with you or with me? I'm only glad if it shows him he wasn't wasting 'is money in getting us to help 'im. Keep quiet and let 'im read 'is book in peace and quiet, why don't you?"

Accordingly, for some minutes, there prevailed a silence impinged on only by the rhythmic nasalization of the slumbering Mr. Tridge, and the occasional rustle of Mr. Lock's newspaper. Then Mr. Clark began to turn himself about fretfully on his mattress, and eventually clambered purposefully out of his bunk.

"*I want mine back!*" he announced, fronting Mr. Dobb in a very definite way across the table.

"Oh, do you?" replied Mr. Dobb calmly. "Well, then you can't 'ave it back! See? For one thing, I put it in the Post Office before we left Stridport, as you very well know, and, for another, an agreement is an agreement, and I wouldn't let you have it back if I could."

"I want it all back, and I'll 'ave it all back!"

"That ain't the way high financiering is carried on, Sam," observed Mr. Lock reproachfully.

"An agreement is an agreement," said Horace. "You subscribed your five quid to the funds of the signdikit, didn't you? Come to think of it, I'm not sure there ain't a Act of Parliament forbids money being handed back when it's put into a company. 'Trust Funds' or something they calls it, and there you are!" he explained with a great air of lucidity. "Done to prevent fickle people like you causing panics, I dare say."

"Same as runs on banks, and things like that," said Mr. Lock. "I should have thought a chap like you would have known the laws of business better than that, Sam."

"Why, you was as keen as any of 'em when we had that special meeting of the signdikit, quarter of an hour after we each got our fiver from Mr. Smith," Horace reminded Mr. Clark. "Going about swelling your chest at all the money you'd got invested, you were, for days after!"

"We was all pretty flush when we decided to invest them five pounds each in the signdikit," returned Mr. Clark. "We ought to 'ave known better."

"We all put our five quid apiece together," Mr. Dobb obstinately reminded them, "and decided it wasn't to be used for nothing else but 'elping the signdikit when the time come. Took oaths on it, we did. And *your* oaths wasn't half horrible and binding, neither. And Joe Tridge, there, come up and see me put the money in the Post Office Savings Bank with his own eyes, and come back and bore witness to it to all of you, all regular and lawful. And *now you* want your money back again! Childish, Sam, that's what you are—childish!"

"And *you're* a smooth-'aired 'arpy, that's what you are!" shouted the nettled Mr. Clark. "And I don't trust you, nor Peter, nor Joe neither, and I think it's a rotten signdikit, so there you are!"

"I don't think anyone else would call a signdikit rotten when it's got nearly a 'undred pounds to do business with at the right moment," returned Mr. Dobb with cold dignity. "There's this here twenty quid, and nigh on seventy quid me and Joe and Peter are keeping safe ashore to put in it. And you, what

is only putting in five quid, have the cheek to call it a rotten signdikit!"

"Well, what is the signdikit doing?" asked Mr. Clark.

"It's keeping its eyes open," guardedly reported Mr. Dobb, in view of the presence of Smith. "It's in comfortable quarters and—and"—he added, with a happy recollection of political meetings he had attended, "and it's spreading its tentycles like a hooctopus."

"Spreading tentycles don't seem to 'elp much, though," said Mr. Clark mutinously. "What's it doing besides spreading tentycles, and keeping me out of my lawful five quid?"

"Securing its position and advancing its interests," said Mr. Dobb. "You wait! One of these days——'Pon me word, come to think of it, it 'ud just serve you right if we was to give you back your money and 'ave nothing more to do with you! When you see me and Peter here and Joe a'sailing round inderpendent in our own—our very own—ship, stopping at any port just as long as we please, and making money hand-over-fist, p'raps you'll be sorry you didn't stick to us then!"

"Well, I don't want to be onreasonable," murmured Mr. Clark. "But——"

"We'll give him his money back, Horace," said Mr. Lock, stiffly. "There'll be an end to his grumbling then!"

"So we will!" agreed Mr. Dobb. "First thing to-morrow, when the post office opens."

"'Ere, you don't want to go taking offence so easy," urged Mr. Clark, in rising alarm.

"I reckon you and me and Joe will 'ave a pretty good time in some of these West of England ports in the

good days to come, don't you, Peter?" remarked Mr. Dobb, totally unheeding Mr. Clark's remark.

"No one to be accountable to but ourselves!" said Mr. Lock, and sat swinging his heels and raptly regarding so charming a prospect.

"I don't see you want to be quite so 'asty with me," muttered Mr. Clark. "I didn't really mean nothing. I only asked what the signdikit was doing."

"Well, and what are *you* doing?" swiftly demanded Mr. Dobb. "What 'elp are you to us? It's a long time since you brought us a bit of news worth remembering."

"And 'ow can I get news?" asked Mr. Clark.

"You ought to be nosing about, finding up little things worth knowing," replied Mr. Dobb. "We don't ever 'ear anything now of what's going on in the saloon, for instance. Don't your Mrs. Brockway ever tell you nothing?"

"I 'ardly pass the time of day with 'er now," said Mr. Clark. "She's got a patient look in 'er eye, what I don't like. I generally manages to be pretty busy when she's about."

"But you was making up to her at Shore'aven before we sailed," commented Mr. Lock.

"Only at times. And that was to prevent 'er making up to *me*. Lately I've let 'er see pretty plain that I'm cooling off," Mr. Clark explained. "Doing it by degrees, I am, so there ain't no particular point where she can catch me up and say I ain't as nice to 'er as I was yesterday."

"Did she ever get that re-directed letter with them lollipops in it, what you sent 'er?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"No," simply replied Mr. Clark. "I 'appened to fetch the letters from the post office myself that day."

"So you and 'er ain't extry particular friendly now?" inquired Mr. Dobb.

"'Good morning,' 'good afternoon,' 'good evening'—that's as far as it goes now," said Mr. Clark with satisfaction.

"And *that's* 'ow you study the interests of the signdikit!" wrathfully cried Mr. Dobb. "You go and fritter away your chances like that, and then 'ave the himpudence to suggest the signdikit ain't doing as much as it ought to! Up you go on deck this minute and start catching up with things!"

"Yes, that's it!" said Mr. Lock. "Go and take her for a nice Sunday afternoon stroll. Go on! That's the idea."

"I don't want to," stated Mr. Clark uneasily.

Mr. Dobb glanced in offended surprise at Mr. Clark, and then turned his shoulder ostentatiously to that portly seaman.

"What I was thinking of was this, Peter," said Mr. Dobb. "The signdikit will get on all the better with only three of us in it. When we wants a jolly evening ashore, it won't come so 'eavy on the takings——"

"There was nothing said about me' aving to make up to females when the signdikit was started," protested Mr. Clark.

"Yes," said Mr. Lock, completely ignoring the plaintive tones of his aged shipmate; "besides which, three is a much handier number than four, whatever way you look at it. Ask two chaps aboard for a game of cards, for instance, and, with the three of us already aboard, there's your five all made up, convenient. But if there's four of us already, one chap's hardly worth asking aboard to share his losings between so many, is it?"

"Well, I'll go," said Mr. Clark, a little desperately. "It's against me hincinations, and it's against me own private interests, and its against me own tastes, but I'll go!"

"Good old Sam!" exclaimed Mr. Dobb, with a quick arrival at cordiality. "Never knew 'im fail us yet!"

"What 'ave I got to ask 'er?" demanded Mr. Clark, peevishly putting on his coat.

"Why, don't ask 'er nothing. Just take 'er for a nice stroll and listen to what she tells you," instructed Mr. Dobb. "We want to know just what's going on in the saloon, and 'ow things are shaping there, and so on."

Smith, laying aside his book, looked across at Mr. Clark.

"There's one or two things concerning the people in the cabin that I'd rather like to know myself," he remarked.

"There you are, Sam, that ought to be worth a bit to you," said Mr. Dobb. "What was it you was wanting to know?" he asked, artlessly, turning to Smith.

"Oh, things!" vaguely replied Smith.

"By the way, didn't I see you chatting with Miss Barton yesterday morning before breakfast?" queried Horace gently.

"Oh, not chatting—not chatting! She was merely saying what a lovely morning it was."

"Oh, I thought she'd slipped up on the wet boards maybe! I see you was 'olding 'er 'and and——"

"Yes, that's—that's just what did happen!"

Smith, after a pause of uncertainty, returned once more to perusal of his book. Mr. Clark, uttering a deep sigh, gazed in vain appeal at Mr. Dobb, and then, distastefully snatching up his cap, he began a slow, reluctant departure from the forecastle.

CHAPTER XII

MRS. BROCKWAY, seated on deck, was doing her best to uphold the dignity of the "Jane Gladys" in the eyes of Tormouth's Sunday afternoon promenaders.

Her dress was of a dully-gleaming sable fabric, with a multiplicity of small, jetty incrustations, and it was fashioned in the flowing voluminous style of a mode long departed. A grim little black bonnet sat defiantly on the hair she had so tightly combed back from her forehead, and a pair of dazzling white cotton gloves clothed the hands primly folded on her lap.

She sat very upright, uncomfortably but most genteelly, on the extreme edge of a deck-chair, watching with unapproving patronage the strollers on the quayside. Occasional tighter pressure of her lips signalized the passing of some damsel whose toilet inclined at all to extremes; and from time to time a rigid trembling of the neck betokened Mrs. Brockway's entire disapproval of brevity and cosmetics as antidotes to age.

Mr. Samuel Clark, drawing within sight of this stern censor of the public, halted and ventured a faint cough.

"Oh, good *hafternoon*, Mr. Clark!" said Mrs. Brockway distantly, looking round at him, and at once looking away again.

"Same to you, ma'am, and many of 'em," returned Mr. Clark. "A lovely *hafternoon*!"

"Yes," she agreed tersely.

"Lots of people about," remarked Mr. Clark.

"Yes," she said again.

In view of this inauspicious opening Mr. Clark was reduced to silence while he groped for further material with which to build a conversational bridge. After much thought, he hesitatingly offered it as his opinion that Tormouth was a nice sort of place.

"Yes."

Such unhelpful reiteration baffled Mr. Clark. Quite fiercely, he stated his belief that it was going to be a fine evening.

"Yes," said Mrs. Brockway.

"Oh, bust!" vehemently observed Mr. Clark, and began to stride away.

"Well, I'm sure!" she exclaimed in shocked tones. "Fancy! There's language for a Sunday afternoon!"

"'Bust' ain't language," defended Mr. Clark halting. "Besides, 'ow could I 'elp it? I come up 'ere, prepared to—to let bygones be bygones, and you treats me off'and like this!"

"And what bygones have *you* got to treat as bygones, pray?" she asked with asperity.

Mr. Clark, after a little reflection, shook his head and remarked that the least said was the soonest mended.

"It's *me* that ought to talk about bygones!" declared the lady. "It isn't the way I'm treating *you* that wants explaining. It's the way *you've* been treating *me*!"

"Me? I like that! You'll hexcuse me saying so, ma'am, but, if so be there's a flirt on this deck at this minute she's wearing a bunnit. And—and a very pretty little bunnit, too!" amplified Mr. Clark in slow ingratiating accents.

Mrs. Brockway ejaculated impatiently and, forgetting the precariousness of her seat, essayed an indignant wriggle of her shoulders. Immediately she slid

into the depths of the deck-chair, with protesting wavings of a neat pair of elastic-sided boots.

"Oh, dear!" cried Mr. Clark at this mishap. "There's a haccident to happen to a lady! Be careful, ma'am!" he begged solicitously. "That chair don't look none too safe. Mind it don't give way. You'd better keep quite still and let me 'elp you up again."

He took her hands and tenderly began to haul her erect.

"Upsee-daisy!" he crooned. "Up she comes! There you are, ma'am, safe and sound again!"

Two irreverent youths on the quayside made ribaldry of Mr. Clark's gallant conduct, and two maidens giggled shrill appreciation and encouragement of these impertient sallies.

"Hobbledehoy and hussies!" hotly commented Mrs. Brockway.

"Oh, you can't altogether blame 'em, ma'am!" said Mr. Clark tolerantly. "They're in love with each other, I dare say, and no one's really responsible for their be'aviour when they're in love. Take you and me, for instance. If only we could 'ave a nice long chat together, I dare say we could both find we've been labouring under some silly mistake or other in thinking things wasn't as they used to be between us."

Mrs. Brockway, discovering that Mr. Clark was still holding her hands, disengaged them gently and made no answer.

"I been thinking all the morning as I'd ask you to come for a nice, long stroll with me this afternoon. Don't tell me you won't come," he begged wistfully. "I can believe a lot of things, but I can't and won't believe as you've got a 'eart as 'ard as that, ma'am."

Mrs. Brockway, melting at this appeal, favoured the stout mariner with a fond smile.

"No, I could'nt be as crool as that to *you*," she said softly. "I'll come for a walk with you. Which way shall we go?"

Arm-in-arm they went forth, a pleasing picture of old-world deportment. Slowly they left the town behind them and climbed the path which led along the warm red cliffs. During this stage of the journey Mr. Clark furnished most of the conversation, talking at times doggedly, and at times aggrievedly.

And next they came to a seat crowning a summit and overlooking a bay of sparkling blue, and here they rested, and now Mrs. Brockway bore her fair share of the burden of speech, saying much that was conciliatory and a great deal that was trustful.

At last they rose and returned to the town by a devious route, first by a chain of sunken lanes, and next by a region of prim new villas. And now Mrs. Brockway was gossiping away light-heartedly, with Mr. Clark rolling along in heedful contentment at her side, and silent save for those artless queries with which he stoked her garrulity into maintaining its speed. . . .

Arrived back at last on the "Jane Gladys," Mr. Clark took a playfully-ceremonious departure from his fair companion, and repaired with all haste to the fore-castle.

Much did he have to impart to his colleagues, and immediate delivery was made all the more easy because of the absence of Smith. That gentleman, Mr. Clark was informed, had spent a full hour dressing himself like a howling toff, and could be observed even now, with the aid of a telescope, fatuously sauntering up and down before the big hotel which sheltered Miss Barton.

Mr. Clark, therefore, began to reel off his news with great celerity and satisfaction. Mr. Horace Dobb,

magisterially sifting the tidings, continually nodded his approval of Mr. Clark's diligence. Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock, thankfully suspending a listless game of dominoes, gave their full attention to their shipmate.

Priority of mention did Mr. Clark give to the present relations existing between Mr. Pidgett and his heir, as observed by the stewardess. It seemed that the rift of incompatibility between sire and son was slowly but certainly widening. Although at first Mr. Pidgett had voiced the loudest admiration of Stanley's behaviour in the matter of the midnight marauder at Stridport, his enthusiasm had rapidly waned, and he now plainly harboured doubts as to the correctness of his son's version of the encounter. More than once, at the dinner-table he had gone so far as to express his complete disbelief in the detail of the revolver.

The mention of a lethal weapon in connexion with the affair came as a surprise to the forecastle. Mr. Dobb ungrudgingly admitted that Stanley had shown sharpness of mind in introducing so dramatic an adjunct to villainy. But Mr. Tridge thought that Stanley ought to have known better than to stretch probabilities thus far, and Mr. Lock merely guffawed profanely at the notion of the drooping Stanley valiantly knocking a revolver out of an assailant's grasp. Further, Mr. Lock raised a certain amount of bickering by saying that he would just as soon believe it of old Sam.

Peace at length restored, Mr. Clark went on to report that their owner's scepticism was resented by Stanley, mostly by looking pained and dignified and by treating his father in an exasperatingly gentlemanly manner. Mr. Pidgett, senior, for his part, returned blunt criticisms of his son's appearance and behaviour, and twice had been distinctly overheard to say that a

thundering good hiding would do the young nincompoop a world of good.

("Worth remembering, that," murmured Mr. Dobb.)

Mr. Clark, next, was able to tell his hearers that Mrs. Pidgett was already weary of the constricted glories of the "Jane Gladys," and often made mention to her spouse of the delights she could derive from a cottage in the country, with a nice garden and hens and stout posts to take a washing-line. Allowing her fancy to run away with her, she would outline a perfect orgy of jam-making and fruit-preserving, till Mr. Pidgett, with a hasty imprecation at such humble ideals, lighted one of his cigars as a corrective to ideas of frugal simplicity and strutted away.

("Another thing worth remembering," said Mr. Dobb.) "*She* won't stand in our way when the time comes."

Mr. Clark next spoke of Miss Barton. The closest eye, according to Mrs. Brockway's evidence, could not detect any advance made by Stanley in her favour. She certainly seemed altogether brighter and livelier this last fortnight, and had stated that she was thoroughly enjoying the cruise. That it was having a tonic effect on her was proved, in the opinion of her uncle and aunt, by the fact that she had now taken to rising very early every day to enjoy the fresh breezes of morning on deck, and that often she would slip out unperceived at night for a last few moments of open air before retiring to rest.

With regard to Smith, Mrs. Brockway had less to communicate, though it appeared that all in the saloon liked him, and all were agreed that his sojourn on the "Jane Gladys" must be made as agreeable as possible. Mrs. Brockway had tried to elicit the reason for this

preferential treatment from Mrs. Pidgett, but that lady could only tell her that it was at Mr. Pidgett's express wish.

"So there you are!" ended Mr. Clark. "Now you knows just 'ow everything is moving. There's just one little thing, though, 'Orace. I sort of 'alf-proposed to Mrs. Brockway this afternoon. You'll see that I don't come to no 'arm, of course?"

"Leave it to me," said Mr. Dobb, with a large gesture. "You'll be as safe as 'ouses. Don't worry about that. We've got far more important things to think about first. In fact, I've already got a sort of a idea, just to be going on with. You know, us being 'ard up at present and that sort of thing."

"Ah, that 'eadpiece of yours!" breathed Mr. Clark, almost with veneration. "Always a-b'iling up and a-b'iling up."

Mr. Dobb folded his arms on the table, closed his eyes, and remained thus for five long minutes. At the expiration of that period, a metallic bumping and rattling overhead announced that Stanley had returned and, for some reason, entertained animosity towards his golfing paraphernalia.

Horace, thus aroused from cogitation, went up to reconnoitre, and found the contents of Stanley's bag carelessly spilled in a semicircle round their owner, who had flung himself into a chair in an attitude of the sourest melancholy.

"No, I don't want any tea!" he snapped in reply to a deferential inquiry from Mr. Dobb. "I don't want anything! I'll have a whole set of new ones to-morrow—a whole bally set!" he announced, spurning the array with his toe. "A rotten course, and a lot of crowding,

week-end bounders, and a regular pot-house of a club and——”

Mr. Dobb implied respectful sympathy by a chastened return to the forecastle.

“Baby’s so cross with all ’is nice toys!” he confided to his shipmates. “Oh, ’e is in such a naughty, *naughty* little temper! Looks just as if nobody loved ’im and ’is skin didn’t fit. ’Pon me word,” he exclaimed with an abrupt change of tone, “I do believe—yes, I do believe—that ’e’s just in the right mood!”

He nodded at his mystified confederates and went back to the scowling Stanley.

A full ten minutes passed without restoring Horace to the forecastle. Then Mr. Clark, cautiously scouting to investigate what might be going forward, saw that Mr. Dobb was held in close converse with Mr. Pidgett, junior. Much of the latter’s vexation of spirit had departed from him, and, while he was still preserving the high dignity of his caste, he was treating with the cook in quite animated a manner.

And while Mr. Clark was still watching, Stanley drew a wad of currency notes from his hip-pocket, and, segregating two of them, handed them to Mr. Dobb.

Mr. Clark forthwith turned and descended, clattering, from his coign of vantage to the floor of the fore-castle.

“*Clicked!*” he proclaimed ecstatically. “’Orace ’as clicked!”

“How did he do it?” eagerly inquired Mr. Lock.

“I dunno! ’Oo cares ’ow ’e done it, so long as ’e *done* it?” returned Mr. Clark, and shut his eyes and breathlessly calculated: “Twice twenty is forty, four into forty goes ten! that’s ten bob each, ’ooray!”

Mr. Tridge, glancing at the clock on the wall, began

a brisk lacing of boots, and, within a minute, Mr. Dobb rejoined his comrades.

Triumphantly he waved aloft a pound note.

"'Ere, there was *two* of 'em!" instantly observed Mr. Clark. "I see 'im give 'em to you myself."

"And I 'eard you see 'im!" retorted Mr. Dobb. "More like a scuttle of coals than a man you sounded. I know 'e give me two. I'm keeping one back."

"We don't want no signdikit business, not on a Sunday," hinted Mr. Clark, dissatisfied.

"I'm keeping one back for the purpose he give me both for," explained Horace. "It's a little idea I thought of, and suggested to him, and 'e fell in with it at once. Know what 'e give me the two quid for? To buy a revolver!"

"Buy a revolver?" echoed a questioning chorus.

"That's it," said Horace. "The revolver 'e knocked out of the burglar's hand that night at Stridport!"

There was a puzzled, searching little pause, and then the voice of Mr. Tridge roundly declared that it was a very neat, bright, pretty little idea, indeed.

"Difficult thing, though, ain't it, to buy a revolver on a Sunday night?" commented Mr. Clark, and then smiled happily. "Ought to be a very enjoyable little job, though. Just think of all the 'ouses we shall 'ave to call in at to make inquiries whether anyone knows anyone 'oo's got one for sale!"

Without delay they set out on their mission. . . .

Mr. James Pidgett, coming next morning to his vessel on some question of stores, was diffidently approached by Mr. Lock.

"Wonder if you'd mind giving me a word of advice, sir?" said Mr. Lock.

The owner, no more able than less exalted people to resist an opportunity of furnishing advice, stopped and invited Mr. Lock to fire away.

“And ‘fire away’ is quite the right words, sir,” remarked Mr. Lock admiringly. “Very witty, sir, if you only knew it. What the French calls ‘*Doo-bell on tongs.*’”

“Never mind what the French calls it,” sharply returned Mr. Pidgett, objecting to linguistic attainments in an inferior. “I’m a plain Englishman, and English is good enough for me. John Blunt—that’s me. What is it you want to know?”

“Well, sir, it’s a matter of law, or rather, of not knowing the law. It’s about a revolver.”

At once Mr. Pidgett’s gaze travelled to Stanley, who, some yards away, was languidly condescending to a newspaper. Then, plainly suspecting covert ridicule, Mr. Pidgett’s glance rested sharply on Mr. Lock, but that pleasant young sailorman’s countenance was as guileless and engaging as ever.

“What revolver?” jerked Mr. Pidgett.

“One I—I found at Stridport, sir.”

“Stridport?”

“Yessir, in the water, sir, when I was having a bathe, sir, the morning of the day we left there.”

Mr. Pidgett accorded Mr. Lock a protracted stare.

“Tell me about it,” he ordered.

“Well, sir, I was bathing, and I see something shining at the bottom of the water, and——”

“Wait a bit! Where were you at the time? The river side of the ‘Jane Gladys?’”

“No, sir, between her and the quay, sir.”

“Funny place to bathe,” commented Mr. Pidgett.

“There was ladies about, sir.”

"Oh!"

"Yessir. And I see something shining, and I had a shot to get it. Four times I had to go down before I got it. Almost under the gangway it was, sir."

"And it turned out to be a revolver?"

"Yessir."

"Um-m-m," remarked Mr. Pidgett slowly, and scratched his chin.

"Of course, sir, at the time I hadn't heard about Mr. Stanley's burglar having a revolver. Mr. Stanley never told us chaps that."

"Strange he didn't mention it while you were all chatting together after the affair."

"P'r'aps he thought we shouldn't believe him, sir."

"And, pray," demanded Mr. Pidgett severely, "why should he think that?"

"Well, sir, that's for *him* to explain," was Mr. Lock's tactful answer. "Just as if we wouldn't take his word for *anything* he told us!"

"I should hope so, indeed," grated Mr. Pidgett.

"So should I, sir," serenely agreed Mr. Lock.

Mr. Pidgett looked again across at his son. Stanley, turning over the sheets of his paper, saw that his sire's gaze was on him. Delicately he sighed and came across to his father. The expression in his eyes plainly asked, "Now what have I done?"

"Lock's telling me something about—about a revolver," said Mr. Pidgett awkwardly.

"I never knew, at the time, that you had first claim on it, so to speak, Mr. Stanley, sir," mentioned Mr. Lock.

"Oh, hang the revolver!" exclaimed Stanley. "What's the good of talking about the beastly thing at all!"

"Well, sir, you see, it's like this. I sold it to Horace the same day and——"

"Do you mean to say that you recovered it—that you've got it now?" exclaimed Stanley.

"Well, I found *a* revolver, sir," said Mr. Lock; "found it in the water when I was bathing at Stridport, and——"

Stanley turned to his father with a lofty gesture of self-vindication.

"All right, all right, my boy," muttered Mr. Pidgett. "You needn't rub it in."

"Well, and I sold it to Horace, and now he's made up his mind to sell it somewhere ashore this morning, and I'd rather like to know how I should stand if there's any trouble about it, sir," continued Mr. Lock anxiously. "You see, I admit it ain't my revolver, not really. I only found it. By rights, I suppose, it's Mr. Stanley's, though I didn't know it when I sold it to Horace, and he didn't know it when he bought it. And now suppose the police, or somebody, gets wanting to know exactly how he come by it? I never give it a thought before, but——"

"Where is it?" asked Mr. Pidgett.

"Horace has got it, sir. It's a very rusty, old-fashioned thing, but he's cleaned it up and——"

"All right. Tell him to bring it here to me at once. And don't *you* worry. We must have that little popgun as a family sooveneer, Stan, my boy," said Mr. Pidgett, affectionately and rather shyly, to his son. "We'll take it up to the hotel and show it to your ma and Nora and some of the swells staying there. Make 'em stare a bit, I'll lay! And—well, I'm sorry, my boy, I'm sorry!"

"Perhaps now you'll believe me another time," said

Stanley, and Mr. Pidgett remorsefully promised that he would.

Horace, hurrying up, expectantly exhibited an aged and dilapidated firearm. Two minutes later he was back with his worshipping shipmates.

"Two quid I got to buy it with, and five bob we give for it," he gloated, "and another two quid I've just sold it to his pa for. And, another thing, we've bought young Stanley without 'aving to pay a penny for 'im."

"If ever we feels like repenting and confessing 'ow we 'elped 'im cheat his father——" said Mr. Tridge, grinning wickedly. "Oh, we've got him all right!"

"Got 'im *there!*" exulted Mr. Dobb, illustratively pressing the tip of his thumb on the table. "And that's *another* asset to 'Orace & Co.'!"

CHAPTER XIII

“ ‘ARK at ’im !” indignantly requested Mr. Tridge. “More like a fox-terrier dawg than a skipper, blessed if ’e ain’t !”

He jerked his head in the direction of Captain Peter Dutt, who, aware that the owner was looking on, deemed the occasion a fitting one to furnish an exposition of his abilities as a disciplinarian. With that object, Captain Dutt was investing so simple a procedure as the fitting up of an awning with an earnestness and urgency far more appropriate to the labours of a fire brigade corps at a conflagration next door to a gunpowder factory.

Curt orders, blistering comments, and impatient instructions issued from the little skipper’s lips in a steady sequence. Occasionally he danced on one foot and then on the other, swinging his head at delays: frequently he darted forward, emitted withering invective, and thrust aside one or other of the crew to show them just how their task should be performed.

The plump Mr. Clark, moist with exertion and resentment, was panting furious things into the canvas folds of the awning. Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock had come to the point of scowling openly at their captain. Smith, at the wheel, viewed his shipmates with sympathetic amusement, and Mr. Horace Dobb, from the window of his galley, regarded the scene in shocked amazement at the skipper’s temerity.

"Talk about militirism!" puffed Mr. Tridge. "A regular martionette, that's what he is!"

"Come on, Clark! Spryer than that!" bawled the skipper. "Wake up, man and look lively! Try and get it into that bladder of lard thing you call your 'ead that you've got to lift that flap around and—No! Not like that, you blessed sleepy, moon-faced——! 'Ere, let *me* do it!"

He dashed to Mr. Clark's side and began to tug and strain at the canvas.

"I won't 'ave it!" stated Mr. Clark, hotly, finding himself screened from the owner's notice. "See? I've 'ad enough and I won't put up with no more of it!"

"That's all right, Sam, old man," returned the skipper, in a completely altered tone. "I don't mean no 'arm by it, as well you know. Only Mr. Pidgett expects discipline and——"

"No 'arm be blowed! What was that you said about a bladder o' lard just now?"

"Figgerative, Sam," explained Captain Dutt, uneasily.

"Well, you go and be figgerative with other folks! I've 'ad enough of it, and so I tells you! A-carrying on like a den of lions!" complained the stout sailorman. "It ain't good enough!"

"We shan't be more than another five minutes, Sam," soothed the skipper. "Then you can take it easy for a bit. After all, we got to keep up appearances, and——"

"*We?*" queried Mr. Clark. "*You* can keep up appearances if you like, but don't look to me to 'elp you. You and your discipline! A pat on the 'ead for you from Mr. Pidgett, and 'arsh words for us—that's what it comes to! Besides, talking about bladders of lard

ain't my idea of discipline! So don't say I 'aven't warned you!"

"You mustn't mind what *I* says, Sam. It's—it's all meant well," declared the skipper, and stepped from behind the shelter of the canvas. "There you are, yeh putty-thumbed sunset!" he roared. "Now p'raps you'll understand what I mean next time."

From behind the draping canvas there at once came an eerie wail. Then Mr. Clark, rolling his eyes horrifically, stumbled out into full view.

"Oo—Oo—Oo—Oo!" he ejaculated with rapidity. "Ah—Ah—Ah—Oo—Oo—Ah! Wow!"

"What the dooce are you laughing at?" bawled the little skipper.

"I ain't laughing!" disclaimed Mr. Clark. "It's my 'eart gone wrong again! That old complaint of mine, colic of the 'eart! I did think I'd lost it, but all this hactivity and worriting! Oo, it's 'orrible! Oh, dear—oh, lor'—oh, deary me!"

Very carefully he lowered himself to the deck and indulged in a prolonged moan. Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock, thankfully seizing a respite, shook their heads and loudly reminded each other of the many occasions ashore that they had witnessed their comrade in the cruel grip of this same ailment.

"Better let him rest awhile in the shade," suggested Mr. Pidgett, troubled by this happening. "P'r'aps a drop of brandy——"

Mr. Clark's moanings suddenly acquired a weird intensity, and Mr. Pidgett turned and hurried into the saloon. Messrs. Tridge and Lock, watching their employer's receding back, were both obviously struck by the same idea at the same moment. For a full second they eyed each other in mutual comprehension and

challenge, and then Mr. Tridge produced a coin from his pocket. It spun momentarily in the air, and Mr. Clark's lamentations covered a curt utterance from Mr. Lock.

"'Eads!" announced Mr. Tridge with satisfaction, lifting his fingers. "*I win!*"

Mr. Pidgett, returning with a decanter and a glass, administered restorative to Mr. Clark with such good effect that the stout mariner at once remarked that he very nearly felt half cured. Repeating the statement with a certain emphasis, he sat up quite expectantly.

"Ah, you'll feel quite cured when you've had a bit of a rest," said Mr. Pidgett disappointingly. "You chaps help him down to his bunk."

Mr. Lock and Mr. Tridge, after performing this kindly action, returned to the deck and resumed their labours with the awning. And presently, in the most inexplicable way, Mr. Tridge tripped over a fold of the canvas and fell prone on the boards.

"Playing cirkisses, or what?" sneered the skipper nastily.

But Mr. Tridge lay motionless.

"He hit his head pretty bad on the boards," remarked Mr. Lock. "I saw him. He's been and gone and fainted, that's what he's done!"

"Fainted?" said Captain Dutt, in honest surprise. "I never knew a chap with a 'ead like Tridge's to faint before!"

"It wasn't only the bump," observed Mr. Lock coldly. "It was him all being worried up and chased about what made his head unsteady, to start with."

"Well, get up a pail o' water and splash 'is 'ead," directed the skipper.

Mr. Tridge, opening one eye, regarded Captain Dutt balefully.

"There, 'e's coming round already!" exclaimed the relieved skipper. "Couldn't 'ave been much of a bump!"

Mr. Tridge, opening his other eye, gazed blankly round him.

"Where am I?" he asked in piteous accents. He found himself being scrutinized by the owner. "Oo, my 'ead!" he murmured, and screwed his eyes very tight shut again.

"Most unfortunate!" declared Mr. Pidgett.

"Poor feller!" sympathetically said Mr. Lock, shaking his head. "Do you feel *very* bad, Joe?"

"Worse than old Sam," groaned Mr. Tridge.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Pidgett with concern. "Unlucky morning, this is! I'd better go and get *him* something now!"

Again he repaired to the saloon. Mr. Lock, ever a sporting loser, knelt beside his shipmate and patted his shoulder.

"Here we are!" said Mr. Pidgett, bustling back. "A nice stiff dose of this'll soon cure faintness and dizziness. My missis swears by it!"

He applied a glass to Mr. Tridge's eager lips. The sufferer after the merest sip spluttered noisily.

"That ain't brandy, sir," he expostulated.

"Sal-volatile," explained Mr. Pidgett. "Nothing like it for faintness! Here, have another go at it!"

"Not me, sir," refused Mr. Tridge. "I don't believe in drug-taking. Besides, I'm feeling heaps better already."

"You better finish it up, Peter Lock," recommended

the skipper dryly, "in case something 'appens to *you* next."

"I'm all right," declared Mr. Lock firmly. "I'll just help poor old Joe down below for a bit of a rest, and then I'll come back, and we'll finish the job."

Supporting his unfortunate shipmate, Mr. Lock passed down to the forecastle. Five minutes passed without his return to duty, and then his face, strangely contorted, appeared on a level with the deck.

"I been and twisted and strained myself, somehow, helping them chaps so careful to their bunks," he explained. "But there ain't no need to worry about me. I'll be all right again when I've had a bit of a lay-down for a hour or two. Don't you bother about me, sir." His face jerked spasmodically into something very like a wink at the skipper. "I can look after myself. It ain't a case for drugs, anyhow!"

It was about an hour later that Captain Dutt, plainly feeling awkward and guilty, came down to see how the three unfortunates were progressing. Mr. Tridge, in his bunk, stared in hostile silence at the visitor, and then turned an offended back to him. Mr. Lock and Mr. Clark, seeking solace in a game of cards, folded their arms and held their chins aloofly.

"Well, 'ow are you getting on, boys?" asked Captain Dutt.

To this inquiry no answer was vouchsafed, except that Mr. Clark murmured his amazement at the audacity of such a question.

"Anyway, you all *looks* much better," ventured the skipper.

"Grudges us a little 'armless recreation now," corrected Mr. Clark in hollow tones.

"Only wants a whip to be complete," mentioned Mr. Lock.

"Besides which cards don't throw a strain on the 'eart," said Mr. Clark.

"Nor yet on the muscles of the abdominica," added Mr. Lock, with commendable refinement.

"A lot 'e cares about *anyone's* annodomicas," growled Mr. Tridge sepulchrally. "Coming down 'ere to—to gloat!"

"Aye, over his victims," amplified Mr. Lock.

"'Ere, steady on!" requested the skipper, pained. "Don't make me out so bad as all that! I only just stepped down to see 'ow you was getting on. There's one or two little jobs waiting and——"

"There you are!" observed Mr. Tridge plaintively. "'E's at it again! Not content with the mischief 'e's done already——"

"All fuss and fireworks, that's what 'e is," summarized Mr. Clark. "Brass buttons on the brain, that's 'is disease!"

"I must say, cap'n, you have altered a lot," remarked Mr. Lock regretfully. "Little did we ever think that you'd treat us chaps like this, after all the years we served with you before. Quite altered, you have. Bullying and roaring at us like that! Taking advantage of your persition, I call it."

"There's no need to talk 'arsh like that, Peter," said the skipper. "You know as well as I do that I don't mean what I says. It's simply done to himpress the howner, as we arranged. 'E seems to expect that kind of thing from sailormen, and it's my dooty to give it to 'im. I don't mean nothing I says when 'e's about."

"Bladders o' lard is bladders o' lard, whether you means 'em or not," contended Mr. Clark obstinately.

"We've 'ad to speak to you before about your be-'aviour, cap'n," said Mr. Tridge severely.

"Oh, well, if you chaps can't see a joke——" muttered the skipper somewhat lamely. "All right, I'll be more careful in future," he promised. "Now come on up like good chaps——"

"What, with my 'eart palpitting like it is?" asked Mr. Clark in stony surprise. "And poor old Joe there practic'ly unconscious, and Peter 'ere in agonies every time 'e moves? What *are* you thinking about, cap'n?"

"You'll be all right," urged the skipper. "I won't give you no 'ard work to do. I only just want you up on deck to show the owner there's nothing serious. He's—he's a bit anxious, and he might think it was all my fault."

"We'll come up when we feels fit for it," returned Mr. Tridge definitely. "We ain't in any 'urry to shove our 'eads into the lion's mouth for a second dose."

"Besides which, we don't take too much notice of your promises, cap'n," said Mr. Lock, but with perfect civility. "But you ain't going to have it all your own way in future. We've got a check on you what we're going to use."

"'Ave we?" asked Mr. Clark in surprise.

"You know, what we was talking about before the skipper come down," replied Mr. Lock, frowning at the questioner.

"Oh, ah, so we 'ave!" said Mr. Clark not too convincingly.

"What are you going to do?" asked the skipper in some trepidation.

"You'll see!" promised Mr. Lock darkly.

For some moments Captain Dutt lingered uncomfortably, and then, with an assumption of unconcern, returned to the deck.

"'Is turn to worry now," stated Mr. Tridge with satisfaction. "And now 'e's gone, Peter, what is our plan?"

"Blessed if I know," admitted Lock. "But we *ought* to have one. We don't get a moment's rest from him, when the owner's aboard."

"'Orace will think of something for us all right," said Mr. Tridge, with every confidence, and forthwith settled himself to slumber.

"Let's get on with the game," suggested Mr. Clark to Mr. Lock. "That is one blessing of 'aving 'Orace about—you don't 'ave to do any 'ard thinking for yourself."

Mr. Dobb, presently descending for a brief respite from his galley, expressed his full approval of the manner in which his shipmates had acquitted themselves in the matter of Captain Dutt's harassing tactics. Requested by his comrades to furnish them with some means of keeping the skipper's energies within reasonable bounds for the future, Mr. Dobb contemplatively smoked a stub of cigarette, and then asserted that the problem was easy of solution.

"If there was someone else giving orders as well as him, we could dodge a lot of work between the two, if we handled things proper," said Horace. "It's him being the only one in authority that keeps him for ever on the dance, for one thing. And, for another, he has to superintend every job 'imself, so he knows he's always responsible, whatever 'appens, and that gets on 'is nerves."

"There ought to be a mate on a boat like this," contended Mr. Lock.

"I know there ought. And 'e was more than 'alf-inclined to 'ave one, you remember, only we persuaded 'im off of it, when we first agreed to come with 'im," said Mr. Dobb. "We didn't want no strange mates nosing in where we knew our way about."

"Well, for the same reason," argued Mr. Lock, "we don't want one now, just when we're nicely settled."

"Oh, yes, we do!" asserted Mr. Dobb. "Provided that 'e's the right kind of mate. And the one I'm thinking of would suit us capital—if only we can arrange it."

"'Oo are you thinking of?" asked Mr. Tridge.

"Mr. Stanley!" said Horace. "'Ow's that, eh? Mr. Stanley as mate on the 'Jane Gladys'! Didn't that ought to 'elp things a bit?"

"'Im?" cried Mr. Clark scornfully. "Why, 'e don't know nothing about the sea, nor nothing else."

"All the better for us!" answered Horace. "We ought to be able to diddle him all the easier. An' we can soon 'int to him, too, that the skipper's trying to take some of 'is authority away from 'im! That'll set Stanley up on his hind legs! And he'll be giving us orders he'll 'ave no right to give, just to spite the skipper. And he'll 'ave all the weight of his pa's authority behind 'im, and—— Oh, there'll be some proper fun and cross-purposes going on! We ought to have thought of this before! Flying in the face of Providence, that's what we've been doing!"

"But do you think it can be managed, 'Orace?" asked Mr. Lock. "Won't young Stanley think it a bit low to be a common mate?"

"Remember that revolver?" asked Mr. Dobb. "Well,

it's 'is turn to oblige *us*, and so I shan't 'esitate to tell 'im neither, if needs be. You 'ave a shave and clean-up after tea, Peter, and you and me will go as a deppytation to see the owner and ask him to appoint a mate."

Accordingly, that same evening, Mr. Lock and Mr. Dobb approached their employer.

"Begging your pardon, sir," opened Mr. Dobb, "but me and Peter is a deppytation, if you wouldn't mind giving us a minute."

Mr. Pidgett nodded brusque permission to continue.

"Well, sir," went on Mr. Dobb, "we're feeling a bit sorry for the skipper. We've known 'im many, many years now, and we know just what 'e's capable of."

"In work, 'Orace means, sir," interpolated Mr. Lock.

"If you'll forgive us saying so, sir, Cap'n Dutt's getting a bit run down. Too much work and responsibility. It regular stabs our 'earts to see the poor old chap so despirit and worried, don't it, Peter?"

"Oh, terrible," supported Mr. Lock.

"All nervy and jumpy, 'e's getting, sir. Dare say you've noticed it yourself?"

"He certainly seemed a bit jumpy this morning," agreed the owner.

"Yes, sir. Well, sir, 'umble shipmates of 'is as we are, it goes against the grain to see the poor old gent like this. So we ventured to get up this deppytation, out of pure friendliness to him, sir, to ask you if you could see your way to easing things a bit for him. He's proud, sir, and 'e's independent, and 'e wouldn't thank us if he knew we'd approached you like this on his be'alf, but——"

"What do you want me to do?" asked Mr. Pidgett suspiciously. "Get rid of him?"

"Oh, dear me, no sir—far from it!" denied Mr. Dobb. "But we was thinking if you could see your way to appoint a mate to help 'im——"

"Now, that's not a bad idea!" conceded Mr. Pidgett, very fairly. "Yes, and I should think Smith would be the very man for the job. I've been thinking he ought to have—— Yes, Smith would be the very man! And I dare say he'd like it too."

"We wasn't thinking of Smith, sir," said Mr. Dobb. "We was thinking of someone far more suitable. We was hoping you'd make Mr. Stanley mate, sir."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Pidgett in surprise.

"We'd like it, sir, and it 'ud give 'im something to occupy 'is spare time, sir, and 'e'd learn a lot, too, sir," pointed out Horace.

"Young Stan as mate, eh?" ruminated the owner. "It's not such a bad notion—blessed if it is! Give him something to think about, and smarten him up a bit and—I've half a mind——"

He turned and shouted imperatively for Stanley.

"These chaps want you to be mate of the 'Jane Gladys'," his father informed him, as he sauntered up.

"Oh, hell!" ejaculated Stanley in blank repugnance.

"We'd very much like to see you as mate, sir," pleaded Mr. Dobb. "You're just the plucky, dashing young gent me and my mates could follow anywhere. And modest! Look 'ow modest you was about that revolver till the story come out through Peter finding it! Ah, we ain't forgot that, sir."

His eye caught and held Stanley's.

"Yes, but——" demurred Stanley.

"Proud of you, that's what we shall be, sir," fawned Mr. Lock. "When we sees you going along the street, all smart and handsome in your peak cap and brass

buttons, we shan't be able to help pointing you out to every one as our mate."

Stanley's lips lost a little of their petulant curve as he contemplated this aspect of a mate's existence. Mr. Pidgett, with a pleased gleam in his eyes, said that the whole thing had taken him by surprise, but that he could think of no objections to the suggestion, beyond his son's ignorance of all matters maritime.

"It's a private boat, sir, so that don't matter," urged Horace. "And Mr. Stanley's just the sort of young gent to get the hang of things very quickly. And I'm sure no one could do the ordering about more dignified than he could."

"It'll be an experience for him," said the owner, pinching his chin. "And I certainly don't want Captain Dutt to have too much strain put on him. And, of course, I like to oblige you men when it's possible. . . . Righto," he determined, "henceforth Mr. Stanley here is mate of the 'Jane Gladys'."

The deputation, according a decorous cheer to the announcement, returned to the forecastle.

"Stan, my boy, I had no idea you was so popular," observed the gratified parent.

"Oh, well——" said Stanley. A shade of thought rested on his brow. "I say, pater," he remarked slowly, "I think brass buttons with our crest stamped on 'em would be something pretty new, wouldn't it? I mean, one's got to tackle a job like this seriously, hasn't one—what?"

CHAPTER XIV

THE crew of the "Jane Gladys," rejoicing in the deputation's successful diplomacy, had decided to accord Stanley a space of three days in which to acclimatize himself to the dignity of his new office before they began to educate him.

Long before the close of the second day they had taken to looking askance upon him, and by the end of the probationary period they had postponed further self-congratulation on their choice of a mate.

A secret convention in the cook's galley extended Stanley's days of grace to five. On the evening of the fifth day the forecastle acrimoniously complained that he was getting worse instead of better. However, on the grounds that the return swing of the pendulum was already overdue, a resolution was passed to allow Stanley's novitiate to run the full week before any disciplinary action be taken.

On the seventh night Mr. Horace Dobb himself frankly admitted that the manœuvre of providing Captain Dutt with a mate was by no means to be reckoned among their triumphs.

For Stanley had taken to authority as a keen diver takes to ten feet of limpid water, immersing himself repeatedly and fully and with relish. That selfsame brain which aforetime had seemed to function in but languid tricklings beneath Stanley's sleek hair now flowed in fecund gushes. Patent to all was it that he possessed no nautical instincts whatever; but equally obvious was it that he had a genius for giving orders.

And therefore, at every available moment, Mr. Stanley Pidgett sauntered the deck and invented futile, irritating little tasks for the twin pleasure of exercising power and knowing that other people were beholding him in the act of exercising power.

His mother always was a proud spectator of his doings, though frequently she counselled him against permitting his constitution to be undermined by over great zeal for work. His father, too, frequently smoked his cigar in silence as he watched him with a valiant, but approving eye. And when Stanley found himself under his sire's surveillance, he always assumed an extra severity and stiffness of manner, an occasionally he would glance at the owner, as though to say, "Yes, here I am, alert and efficient. Now don't you feel awfully humble for all the things you've ever said and thought about me? You see I *can* rise to the occasion, when I like."

And for Miss Barton, when she appeared on deck, he had another look which plainly intimated that he considered it really extraordinary that so self-reliant and masterful a personality as he possessed should not be making faster progress in her favour.

The crew of the "Jane Gladys," when they foregathered at the expiration of that devastating week, unanimously expressed the opinion that the time had come to do something drastic.

"Worse than the skipper, young Stanley is!" declared Mr. Clark. "Showing off the whole blessed time, 'e is! When 'e ain't showing off in front of 'is ma, 'e's showing off in front of 'is pa, and when 'e ain't showing off to 'is pa, 'e's showing off to Miss Barton. And if none of 'em ain't about, 'e's showing off to 'isself!"

"I never see such a dissatisfied little 'orror," asserted Mr. Tridge. "Talk about the scrubbing and polishing I've had to do these last few days! It used to be bad enough when the skipper's wife used to come a cruise with us in the old days, but she was the manageress of a 'Ome of Rest compared to young Stanley up there!"

"Kid with a new toy," tersely said Mr. Dobb.

"Ah! but *we* ain't made of clockwork," pointed out Mr. Clark. "There's no springs in *me*, 'specially after I'd done beeswaxing the saloon floor on me 'ands and knees twice over, just so 'e could practise the newest dances to the phonygraph if ever 'e 'ad a mind to. 'E told me that was why 'e 'ad it done! I didn't 'alf do my best to make it as slippery as I could, I give you *my* word! If wishes come true, 'e'll be wanting all the pillows 'e can lay 'ands on soon."

"What about *me*, then?" cried Mr. Tridge. "Polished all the brasswork till I was fit to fall to bits, and then 'e asks me to point out careful to 'im which I'd done and which I 'adn't done; and then, just because 'is pa's looking on, 'e tells me to do it all over again and not breathe so 'ard on it next time."

"He come much the same game with me," said Mr. Lock. "I pretty soon reminded him about that revolver."

"Well?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"He said, very stiff, there was such a thing as conspiracy to obtain money by false pretences, but he'd overlook it if I didn't cause him no more trouble."

"Well, there's cheek!" said Mr. Dobb, with evident admiration. "I must say he's got some wits about 'im when 'e likes to use 'em. Look what 'appened when you chaps tried to get out of doing something the skip-

per 'ad ordered, by getting Stanley to give you a 'ole lot of fresh orders."

"Yes, 'e give us the fresh orders, right enough," recalled Mr. Tridge. "And then when the skipper wanted to know why we 'adn't carried out 'is orders, young Stanley interferes. Says 'e didn't know the skipper 'ad given us any orders, but, that being the case, we're to carry 'em out at once, and then do the jobs *he'd* given us. All we got was two sets of orders to carry out, and the skipper 'ad the laugh of us proper."

"No, young Stanley ain't going to be no good to us," said Mr. Clark sadly. "It's a pity we ever—it's a pity *you* ever thought of the idea, 'Orace."

"We'd certainly 'ave got on better if we'd let the owner appoint Smith, as he first suggested," remarked Mr. Lock.

"Ah! and that reminds me," rejoined Mr. Dobb, "he ain't living up to 'is early promise, to speak poetic."

"Getting on for a month 'e's been with us now, and, beyond a few drinks now and then, we've 'ad nothing from 'im since those five quid apiece," said Mr. Tridge, comprehending. "That ain't *my* idea of enterprise."

"'E 'as a chat with Miss Barton, first thing most mornings, and last thing most nights," said Mr. Clark. "I s'pose that satisfies 'im. And owing to the saloon folks thinking 'e's a nobleman in disguise, 'e's 'aving a easy life of it. Don't s'pose 'e wants much more."

"Well, *we* do!" stated Mr. Dobb. "In fact, I've been thinking it's time we give the panorammer another turn for 'im. More than that, I've thought out a way to do it, too. Jealousy. 'E's too comfortable, and 'e needs waking up a bit."

"Get 'im green with jealousy, and 'e'll be owning up

to 'oo and what 'e is, and offering us all sorts of amounts to 'elp 'im in 'is courting," prophesied Mr. Tridge.

"All the same," said Mr. Clark slowly, "this is a red 'erring! 'Orace 'as only started all this talk about Smith to get us off talking about the mistake 'e made in persuading the owner to appoint Stanley as mate."

"You're sharp, ain't you?" asked Mr. Dobb, in evident chagrin at the plump sailorman's astuteness.

"Sharp enough to annoy other people 'oo thinks I ain't sharp, anyway," retorted Mr. Clark. "I know you, 'Orace. I've seen you swagger into the saloon bar and come out quiet by the tap-room door before to-day. You've made a 'owling mistake over getting young Stanley as mate, and you know it!"

"You want to wait till the 'ole thing's finished, and then you'll sing a different tune," said Mr. Dobb defiantly.

"I shall 'ave a golden 'arp to accompany meself on, then," derided Mr. Clark. "What's going to make me change my opinion, I'd like to know?"

"You'll see," promised Mr. Dobb.

"Oh, no, I shan't! You're only making up things to try to keep me quiet! The thing's finished now, and you know it!"

"Finished? It's only 'alf-begun!" declared Mr. Dobb.

"Well, what's the rest of it, and why didn't you tell us it at the time?" challenged Mr. Clark. "Answer me that, if you can! What's the rest of it, eh?"

Mr. Dobb, thus pressed, frowned his displeasure, but made no response.

"There you are!" jeered Mr. Clark. "Caught!"

"I must say, if you've got a answer for 'im, 'Orace, you ought to let 'im 'ave it," remarked Mr. Tridge.

"If I don't give answers it's because the time to give 'em ain't come yet," replied Mr. Dobb slowly. "I've got the answer in my 'ead all right, but—but——"

"Wriggling!" taunted Mr. Clark.

"Very well, you'll see," said Mr. Dobb, with a certain goaded desperation. "I says that getting young Stanley as mate is only 'alf a move I've got on the board. Remember that!"

"Yes, and then you changes the subject and wants to talk about Smith instead. *You remember that!*" requested Mr. Clark.

"Well, it's—it's——" began Mr. Dobb, and then gulped. "It's Smith as is the rest of the move on the board!"

"Well, tell us 'ow and we'll believe you!"

"There's one or two little bits I've got to finish thinking out," said Horace. "Then you'll see 'oo's right!"

Mr. Clark's frame shook with sardonic laughter, and Messrs. Lock and Tridge, who had been intermittently looking hopeful, now shook their heads and gazed reproachfully at Horace.

"All right, don't believe me!" cried Mr. Dobb, affecting high passion, and began to leave the forecastle.

"There 'e goes!" scoffed Mr. Clark. "Running off to try and think desprit 'ard and see if there ain't some way by which 'e can save 'is face!"

To this the retreating Horace made no response, for the absolute truth of Mr. Clark's charge rendered repartee elusive.

Gaining the deck, Mr. Dobb hastened to the solitude of his galley, and here he remained till an excruciating

ating headache drove him to the solace of open air. Glimpse of the dim figure of Smith, up in the bows, drew him to that gentleman's side.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Smith, at Horace's light foot-fall. "Oh! it's you, is it?" he ended, his tone flattening from eagerness to disappointment.

"Me it is," answered Horace. "A nice night. By the way, 'oo did you think I was?"

"Oh, no one!"

"In course not," agreed Horace humorously. "'Oo could you think it could be? You'd never 'ave dreamed it could be a young lady, for instance, could you? In course not!"

"A young lady? I don't understand you."

"Don't you!" asked Mr. Dobb dryly. "Why, a little bird's been telling me—well, telling me things."

Smith refrained from seeking explanation.

"'Course, it ain't my business," said Mr. Dobb. "I don't know nothing for certain about you nor nobody else. But I wish you luck—oh, I wish you luck, right enough. Only thing is, you ain't the only one."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Smith.

"There's others trying to make the running what have got far better chances than you."

"I know who you mean."

"'E don't 'alf try to fascinate 'er," chuckled Mr. Dobb.

"Confounded young puppy!"

"Tried to put 'is arm round 'er neck the day before yesterday. I see 'im through my galley window."

"Infernal cheek!"

"Ah! and last evening 'e tried to kiss 'er, too! I see 'im."

"She never told me that!"

"Oh, I dare say she thought it wasn't worth mentioning."

"Not worth mentioning—a thing like that?" growled Smith.

"Well, I mean, I don't suppose she wanted to worry you about it," said Mr. Dobb smoothly. "There's no need for you to go saying anything to 'er about it. I wouldn't like 'er to think that anyone was spying on 'er."

"He tried to kiss her, did he?" rasped Smith fiercely.

"'E did, but she give 'im the slip very neat."

"Thundering little bounder! I'd like to *kiss* him! Of all the confounded cheek. I've half a mind to clout his silly head for him!"

"Don't you try that!" advised Mr. Dobb. "That 'ud be mutiny. It would be pretty serious for you."

"I'd give anything to have him stand up to me for just one round!" yearned Smith.

"What would you give exactly?" inquired Mr. Dobb, his commercial instincts automatically asserting themselves.

"Five pounds!"

"Do you mean it?"

"I do! It would be worth it!"

"I wish I could arrange it," said Mr. Dobb fervently. "But there ain't no way I can think of. Wait a bit!"

He turned sharply and made a shambling circuit of the deck. An old shred of sea-lore had rustled in his memory, and he had pounced on it, and was bearing it off for undisturbed examination.

"'Ere, 'ow would you like to be mate of this boat?" he asked, returning in excitement to Smith's side.

"Oh, I don't know! I'm pretty comfortable as I am."

"If you was mate you'd 'ave a lot more chances to—well, being a ordinary seaman you ain't allowed aft. Mates is. If you was mate many's the opportunity you'd get to slip a few words down the back of 'er neck in a whisper, while you was passing 'er in 'er chair," explained Mr. Dobb.

"Why, so I could!" agreed Smith. "By Jove, so I could. Besides, they could hardly object to the mate talking to her, now and then, in a civil, respectful way, could they? Oh, but what's the good? I'm not in the least likely to be made mate. That confounded young puppy is mate already, and he's scarcely likely to resign in my favour."

"Don't you ever think a thing impossible till you've tried it," recommended Mr. Dobb. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if—— What would you give to be made mate?" he ended bluntly.

"Five pounds!"

Mr. Dobb, charmed by this penchant of Smith's for bidding in terms of five pounds, stated his gleeful conviction that his new shipmate was a sport, a true gent, and a real toff.

In the firmament so recently obscured by baffling mists Horace now saw the star of hope flaming brilliantly. Calling softly down to the forecastle, he summoned the sceptical Mr. Clark on deck and led him to Smith.

"'E's promised us ten pounds on certain conditions," announced Horace to Mr. Clark.

The plump sailorman seized Smith's hand and wrung it.

"I ain't going to explain everything, not even now, Sam," said Mr. Dobb. "I'm just giving you an inkling of what's coming, so you won't go showing your ignor-

ance so silly again in a 'urry. Smith 'ere, for reasons best known to me and 'im alone, 'as got a grudge against young Mr. Stanley, and 'e wants to fight it out with 'im with fists, all legal and proper. If that comes off there's a fiver for us."

"Ho, I see!" returned Mr. Clark, dashed. "It's one of them 'if' things."

"Yes, and there's another five pounds for us if 'e gets made mate instead of Stanley."

"And that's another blessed 'if' thing," commented Mr. Clark coldly. "'Ave you 'atched out any more, or am I supposed to apologize to you now at once?"

"Call 'em 'if' things, if you like," returned Horace, "but don't forget I'm the sort of man what crosses out the word 'if' with one stroke of me pen whenever I comes to it. Mark my words, Smith's as good as mate already, if we plays our cards right."

"Aye. *If!*" sneered Mr. Clark.

CHAPTER XV

THE "Jane Gladys" lay in the wide estuary between the twin towns of Plynhampton and Shotsey, as conspicuous there as an albino baker at a convention of negro chimney sweeps.

Once again had Mr. James Pidgett succumbed to a desire to swoop unheralded on his London works to observe the activities of the staff in their moments of fancied security. To conduct this research he had left the "Jane Gladys" that morning, almost as soon as her anchor had splashed into the water.

It was Mr. Peter Lock who had sculled him ashore. A request made by Stanley to his father, as the latter began to descend into the ship's boat, had met with a curt, decided refusal which had not escaped the attentive oarsman's notice.

Returned from transport duty, Mr. Lock did not delay a moment in going to the galley to supply a report to headquarters. Arrived at Mr. Dobb's domain, however, a little natural hesitation overcame Mr. Lock, for Horace was not there, and the only occupant was Mrs. Pidgett, who was quite tenderly polishing a metal tray.

"I beg pardon, ma'am," said Mr. Lock. "I didn't think you'd be here."

"I was just,"—breathed the owner's wife guiltily—
"I was just——"

"Ah! I see you see 'Orace ain't got time for everything, ma'am," remarked Mr. Lock with excellent tact. "Very kind of you to try to give him a hand. There's

many ladies would think it beneath them to touch anything what looked like work."

"Why, there's nothing I like better than——" began Mrs. Pidgett, and checked herself. "I don't *really* mind this sort of work," she said.

"Don't you, ma'am?" asked Mr. Lock in polite surprise.

"I *like* it," she asserted, looking a little defiant.

"Oh, as a hobby, of course!" conceded Mr. Lock. "Well, there's ladies had stranger hobbies than that. I once knew a real, tip-top lady who gave lectures on teetotalism."

"Just fancy!" returned Mrs. Pidgett, evidencing interest in the topic. "Well, *I'd* rather spend my time in a kitchen, any day. As a—a 'obby, of course," she thought it necessary to explain.

"Of course, ma'am," accepted Mr. Lock.

"I wish I had—I wish I had the chance of doing a bit more in here, sometimes," confessed Mrs. Pidgett, bending her head lower over the tray. "I must say I find time hangs a bit heavy, now and then. A ship's different to a house. In a house you can slip off to some quiet corner and find something to occupy your mind with. But it isn't so easy to be private, to yourself, on a ship. And then, again, Mr. Pidgett don't like it. You see, he's never had a kitchen of his own, so to speak."

She sighed, and rubbed vigorously at the tray.

"One misses it," she added. "One can't help missing it, after you've been used to it so long."

Mr. Lock nodded sympathetically.

"Sometimes I long to give the place a thorough turn out and tidy up, whether it needs it or not," she said, looking wistfully round the galley.

"You ought to have a real good go-in at it, while you've got the chance, ma'am," advised Mr. Lock.

"I wish I could! Only——"

"Easy enough, ma'am," declared Mr. Lock. "Mr. Pidgett's away, and I don't suppose we shall see much of Mr. Stanley while we're lying here. And I'm sure Miss Barton wouldn't say nothing, nor Mrs. Brockway, nor Captain Dutt, either. Why, you could put in a whole day, if you like, cooking and all!"

"But—but the men——" demurred Mrs. Pidgett.

"Easy enough to get rid of them, ma'am," said Mr. Lock softly. "You've only got to tell the skipper to give 'em a whole day's holiday ashore to-morrow, and that'll be quite all right."

"Do you really think so?"

"Sure of it, ma'am. Particularly if they had a bob or two to spend," returned Mr. Lock even more softly.

There was a protracted pause while habit fought a battle with desire in Mrs. Pidgett's breast. At length her hand went slowly down to the pocket of her dress.

"Here's a pound note," she said. "That'll be four shillings each for the five of you. Don't waste it. And I'll see Captain Dutt myself, and get a day's holiday for you all to-morrow. And you must promise to keep all your friends out of the way, without telling them why."

"That'll be all right, ma'am."

"I shall have a high old time!" declared Mrs. Pidgett, already looking round the galley with an eager gaze.

"Regular home from home, ma'am," he assured her.

"Yes," she agreed, and suddenly smiled quite mischievously. "And, after all, Mr. Pidgett's always complaining that I don't spend any money on myself!"

Excited, and more than a little flustered by her own daring, she finished her task with feverish energy and then took her departure.

Left alone, Mr. Lock somewhat disparagingly examined the note in his hand.

"Only a quid," he muttered. "That ain't much. I do hope I ain't losing my dash. Horace will have something sarcastical to say, I bet! Oh, well!" he ended more cheerfully, "I managed to get it out of a female, anyway, so it counts double at least. And then there's the day's holiday to come."

Mr. Dobb, entering at this juncture, noticed what Mr. Lock held in his fingers, and at once demanded information. So far was he from treating his ship-mate's ingenuity with scorn, that he complimented Mr. Lock on his presence of mind, and confessed that he, himself, had never for a moment regarded Mrs. Pidgett as a potential source of income.

"After all, five bob apiece and a day off ain't so bad," pointed out Mr. Dobb. "Wait a bit, what am I saying? Five bob apiece? I mean *ten* bob apiece!"

"Ten bob?" questioned Mr. Lock. "How do you make that out. There's five of us and—— Oh, I see, you mean just us two and say nothing to the others?"

"No, I don't, Peter, and I'm surprised you should think of a mean thing like that!" replied Mr. Dobb virtuously. "Just as if Mrs. Pidgett wouldn't spoil everything by mentioning what she give you to Sam and Joe some time or other! Honesty is always the best policy, Peter, when you're likely to be found out in the end."

"Well, then, how do you make it ten bob each?"

"Why, Smith won't take 'is share, you can depend on that. Like as not, too, 'e'd rather 'ang about the boat

all day for a chance of getting a word or two with Miss Barton."

"But I promised the old gal we'd all clear out."

"I know. But it's like this, Peter, I got a mind like a rat-trap," vaunted Mr. Dobb. "Take in everything at once, I do. If we get a quid from Mrs. Pidgett, and another from Smith, that'll be ten bob each for us four, won't it?"

"Yes, it will, but why should Smith——"

"Because I'm going to put it up to 'im. Don't you think 'e'd willingly pay a quid for the chance of rowing about this 'ere 'arbour all day with Miss Barton? You leave it to me, Peter! As I says, you've done very well for a start, but it needs a practised 'and to turn a thing over and make the most of it."

Mr. Dobb, having thus reasserted his mental superiority, accepted Mr. Lock's tributes with modesty, stating that this newest idea of his was but a side-line and the mere mechanical result of his own peculiar style of mind-training.

"Right you are, I'll leave it to you," agreed Mr. Lock. "And now I'll tell you what I came here in such a hurry to tell you. It may be useful knowledge, and it may not. Young Stanley's dead broke, and he's asked his father for money, and his father refused him. Very short-off, he was! I heard him as he come down the side to get into the boat."

"Like that, is it?" murmured Mr. Dobb. "Young Stanley broke, and us lying here for a couple of days or more? That ought to lead to something, didn't it?"

"So *I* thought. But what, where, how and when, I can't quite see. Anyway, I thought I'd tell you and you'd know what was up."

"So the old chap's cross with 'is blue-eyed angel, eh?"

mused Mr. Dobb. "I noticed 'e'd been getting a bit impatient with 'im this last week. Anyone could see why it was. Stanley was losing interest in his job as mate."

"Got as slack as anything, thank goodness," affirmed Mr. Lock. "The novelty's wore off, quite. He just sits about, and don't take the slightest notice of anything, whether he's in charge or not. As he's got these last few days he's just the sort of mate I can get on with. Even old Sam don't wish him no harm now. The longer young Stanley holds his job the better I shall like it. Ah! you and me done right, after all, to choose him."

"'E's got to go, first chance, for all that," replied Mr. Dobb. "S'pose 'e 'as a relapse into his first kind of be'aviour? We'll be sorry then that we ever showed 'im any mercy. Besides, there's Smith's ten quid we wants to land for the signdikit. No, 'e's got to go and—and do you mind leaving me alone for a hour or so, Peter, now? I've got a bit of 'ard thinking to do."

Quite readily Mr. Lock responded to this appeal by quitting the galley at once. A last glance as he passed through the door showed him Mr. Dobb, with his arms already folded portentously across his chest, staring with a terrific frown into vacancy.

Some while after, Mr. Dobb emerged from seclusion and went dubiously towards Mr. Stanley Pidgett, who was sulking spectacularly in a chair.

"Don't you go near 'im—'e'll bite!" observed Mr. Clark, gleefully intercepting the cook. "'E's 'ard up! Mrs. Brockway's just been telling me. 'E went up to 'is ma, sort of careless, and told 'er 'e was spent out, and asked 'er for some money. And she told 'im she never thought of asking 'is pa for some money before 'e left, and that all she 'ad was a quid note and some

odd coins, and she's already spent the quid. And when 'e 'eard that 'e didn't 'alf let on! Proper offended 'er, 'e 'as! She said that 'e's so rude that she wouldn't 'elp 'im, not even if she could! Yes, and warned Captain Dutt against lending 'im anything either. Give 'im two and nine, she did, and told 'im 'e ought to think 'imself lucky to get that!"

"When I want you to jabber to me when I'm busy I'll ask you," said Mr. Dobb, and passed on.

"And when are you going to happoint a new mate?" jibed the offended Mr. Clark.

"I'm just going to start making arrangements now," was Mr. Dobb's answer, and Mr. Clark crowed derisively at it.

Mr. Dobb, reaching Stanley's side, coughed respectfully. Undeterred by the response of a hostile scowl, Mr. Dobb plunged into speech.

"You'd be bound to know a bit about joolry, sir," he remarked, and displayed a small circlet of yellowish metal. "This ring, for instance, sir. I 'ad it given to me, and what it's worth is more than I can guess. What do *you* reckon it ought to be worth, sir?"

"I'm not a bally pawnbroker," said Stanley petulantly.

"Far from it, sir," agreed Mr. Dobb. "But it's a pawnbroker I've got to take it to, and I'd just like to know before'and whether 'e's trying to diddle me or not."

"I'm not interested in your troubles."

"After all, sir, there's no real 'arm in going to a pawnbroker, is there, sir?" remarked Mr. Dobb with undiscouraged loquacity. "'Evil be to them what evil thinks' is 'ow I always looks at it. What I mean to say is, if a man's 'ard up 'e's got to do the best 'e can for 'isself, ain't 'e?"

Stanley shifted in his seat, and eyed Mr. Dobb with some suspicion.

"So, me being as 'ard up as I jolly well can be," continued Mr. Dobb very naively, "I don't think no shame of going to a pawnbroker with this 'ere ring. After all, we shall be coming back this way sometime, and then I may be flusher, and I can get me ring back, and no one'll be any the wiser."

"Ah, y-yes," said Stanley slowly.

"No fun being 'ard up in a place like Plynhampton or Shotsey," observed Mr. Dobb. "There's all sorts of fun you can 'ave there, if only you've got the money."

"Lively sort of places, eh?"

"Needn't 'ave a dull moment, sir, while you've got a penny in your pocket."

"Just my bally luck!" growled Stanley.

"I reckon it ought to fetch at least 'alf a crown, don't you, sir?" asked Mr. Dobb, striving to make a stone in his ring glint in the sunlight. "Anyway, I'll 'ope for the best. I know just the right sort of nice, quiet little shop where they won't ask too many questions, and I'm going down there soon as ever I've 'ad a shave. Nothing I can do for you up-town, I suppose, sir? I mean, in the way of fetching noospapers or posting letters or so on?"

Stanley shook his head, and Horace repaired below to the forecastle to occupy himself awhile with his razor. Lock, despatched on scouting duty, returned with the report that Stanley had, at any rate, ceased to throw himself fretfully about in his chair.

The amenities of shore-going toilet duly achieved, Mr. Dobb went on deck, whistling cheerfully.

"I'm just off, sir," said he to Stanley. "Now are you quite sure there's nothing I can get or do for you in Plynhampton, sir?"

Stanley glanced quickly around him and beckoned to the cook. "Wait a bit," he said. "I—I'm not quite sure. Can you—can you keep a secret—what?"

"Like a hoyster!" asseverated Mr. Dobb.

"Well, then, just wait here a moment."

Stanley rose, made a great to-do of yawning, and went to his cabin. Mr. Dobb, straining his ears, caught the sounds of drawers being pulled open and banged shut.

A brief silence followed, and then something fell and smashed noisily. Immediately on this, the voice of Stanley was raised in loud and incoherent song, as though to smother any suspicion that anything unusual might be astir. And finally, the splendid youth reappeared at his cabin door. He displayed to Horace's notice a small and singularly inexpert parcel, and, at the same time, did his best to wink conspicuously and yet with perfect dignity.

"Here you are!" he said. "I want you to take these with you. Ask 'em to press 'em for you, and send 'em back on to me as soon as possible."

"I understand, sir," replied Horace, taking the package.

"For goodness' sake, don't rattle it!" exhorted Stanley in a whisper. "I'm not good at parcels. It's a lot of silver-mounted clutter out of the dressing-case the mater gave me. No bally use, really. Get what you can on 'em where you take your ring. And mind you don't tell a soul!"

"Not a single, solitary soul, sir," promised Horace, and straightway lowered himself into the boat.

He returned in under an hour, and privily handed a small square of pasteboard and the sum of four pounds to Stanley. He mentioned that even the pawnbroker

had remarked on the excellent taste and massive purity of the goods, and added regretfully that he—Horace Dobb—had never had a mother. Then, after accepting a small monetary solatium from the enlivened Stanley, the cook returned to the society of Mr. Lock.

“So far, so good, Peter, my lad!” proclaimed Mr. Dobb. “The first hact is just over, and the dashing young ’ero is already in the machi-whats-is-name’s of the crafty villain.”

“Masheeniations,” supplied the erudite Mr. Lock.

“It’s a hundred to one that Stanley’ll be wanting you to take ’im ashore in a few minutes,” continued the cook. “And then it will be your job to keep a very close eye on ’im, and find out ’ow ’e squanders ’is ’ard-earned bottle-tops and what-nots. There’s no good in putting a rope round a thing unless you’re going to tie the knot pretty tight.”

Five minutes proved the talents of Mr. Dobb as a prophet, for Mr. Lock was summoned to convey Stanley to the pier.

“Don’t come back till you can ’elp it,” instructed Mr. Dobb. “You can easy make out to the skipper that you thought you ’ad to stand-by to bring Mr. Stanley back again. Once you’re ashore you stay ashore, and follow Stanley everywhere. If ’e should ’appen to catch sight of you, go straight up to ’im and tell ’im you was trying ’ard to find ’im to ask whether ’e wanted you to wait for ’im or not.”

It was not till late in the afternoon that Mr. Lock at length returned to the “Jane Gladys.” He returned alone, and was weary, though well content with the result of his labours.

He had, it transpired, craftily shadowed Mr. Stanley Pidgett from the time that he had set him down

at the pier-steps to the hour that a forfeited dinner had compelled him to put the demands of appetite before anything else and return to his tea.

Mr. Stanley, stated the amateur detective, had thoroughly enjoyed himself ashore, according to his lights. He had spent a full hour in magnificent patrol of the pier, beheld and yet not beholding, floating gracefully about among the promenaders, but with so exclusive a deportment that almost one might imagine that he could not be aware of the throng that moved around him.

And then Mr. Stanley had lunched at an hotel on the sea-front, and had sunned himself on the steps for a half-hour after that, and next had bought cigarettes at a shop opposite the pier.

It had been a lengthy business, this purchase of cigarettes. Indeed, three separate times had Mr. Lock passed the open shop-door, and on each occasion Stanley's head had still been inclined over the counter with the assistant.

"A gal?" demanded Mr. Dobb hopefully.

"A gal, of course," confirmed Mr. Lock. "And he wasn't half showing off to her neither! A saucy boy, that's what he was being! I couldn't see his face, but I know he was making goo-goo eyes at her face from the way his ears was flapping."

"Thank goodness!" breathed Dobb. "Just what's wanted."

"Well, and when he comes out, ever so long after, he was looking backward and still smiling and waving his hand. Tripped over the doormat, he did, and got into a *fraycasses*——"

"A *what*?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"A quarrel, then, with an old gent he'd barged into. And after it was over he went back to the pier, very haughty, for a bit, and then he went and swaggered up and down the sea-wall for a half-hour, like as if he'd bought it. And then blessed if he didn't go back to the cigarette shop again! And that's where I left him when I come over hungry."

"We'll 'ave a look-in at that shop this evening, Peter, before it shuts, when we all goes ashore," decreed Mr. Dobb.

And so it came about that, a couple of hours later, an attractive young damsel behind the counter of one of Plynhampton's smartest tobacconists' shops found herself greatly entertained by the simple humours of four sailormen.

One of them was plump and elderly, and he professed the pleasantry of having fallen violently in love at first sight with the young lady assistant. His three companions, begging her not to take old Sam too seriously, convulsed her with stories of that worthy's impetuous courtships at other ports.

"Don't you take no notice of them, missie," begged Mr. Clark. "Jealous, that's what they are! They don't like to see you smiling at me so kind out of them lovely big, round blue eyes of yours. 'Andsomest eyes I ever see!" he declared raptly.

"That's just what you used to say to that gal in Stridport, Sam!" taunted Mr. Tridge.

"I didn't!" declared Mr. Clark. "'Er's was brown eyes."

"Bit forward of you, I reckon, to talk like that to the young lady when you don't even know 'er name," observed Horace.

"It's a lovely name, whatever it is," said Mr. Clark gallantly. "From the look of 'er," he hazarded, "I should say it was Eupheemy."

The young lady squealed in amusement at this suggestion.

"That's a bad guess," observed Mr. Lock. "Now I wouldn't mind betting a tanner that it's a name like Rose—you know, some flower or other."

"I'll bet a tanner it ain't," said Mr. Dobb. "I'll bet it's either Ethel or Mary."

"Done!" snapped Mr. Lock. "And the young lady herself shall decide which of us is right. Wait a bit, though, suppose we're both wrong? Who gets the money then?"

"Old Sam shall take it, blessed if he don't!" cried Mr. Dobb in high good humour. "Just as a sort of consolation."

"Agreed!" said Mr. Lock. "Now, miss, which of us is right? Is it the name of a flower, or Ethel or Mary?"

"You're neither of you right!" returned the young lady with a certain malicious satisfaction. "And the money goes to this nice old gentleman here."

Mr. Clark was gleefully expressing his gratification when Mr. Lock interrupted to remark that it was all very well, but he would want to be quite sure he was wrong before he paid up.

"But you *are* wrong," asserted the damsel. "Quite wrong. My name's Hilda, so there!"

"Hilda, eh?" said Mr. Dobb. "Righto, Sam, that's a tanner me and Peter each owes you. I wonder you don't offer to take the young lady to the pickchers on your winnings."

"Just what I'm a-going to do. Will you do me the

honour of coming along with me, missie?" asked Mr. Clark.

"I'm afraid I can't," smiled the girl. "I've got an appointment already. I'm going to the theatre."

"Well, to-morrow night, then?" pressed Mr. Clark.

"Going to the second show at the Hippodrome."

"Well, I don't bear 'im no ill will," said Mr. Clark.

"'E's a lucky young man, 'ooever 'e is."

"Now then, Mister Cheeky," chided the girl roguishly. "Who told you it was a young gentleman?"

"Guessed as much," said Mr. Clark gloomily.

"That's enough, Sam," said Mr. Dobb with intentional ambiguity, and began to marshal his forces towards the door.

Mr. Clark, sustaining the rôle of unsuccessful suitor, was the last of the party to leave, quitting the premises with a dejected mien which caused fresh paroxysms of mirth in the young lady. No sooner was Mr. Clark outside, however, than he, too, succumbed to mirth, albeit of a quieter character.

"Name of 'Ilda," he chuckled; "and she's going to the theatre this evening, and the 'Ippodrome to-morrow evening. Now all we've got to do is to split up and watch the hentrances when the doors open, and if we don't see 'er sailing in, arm-in-arm with young Mr. Stanley, I'll—I'll turn teetotaller!"

An hour later the four sailormen entered the nearest hostelry to the theatre. Mr. Samuel Clark's order was for a pint of old ale.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. HORACE DOBB, after a little preliminary conversation next morning with Smith, went over and spoke to Mr. Lock. Mr. Lock, nodding understandingly, went up on deck and, assuming a baffled look, approached Mrs. Pidgett.

"It's a bit awkward, ma'am," he said. "Us chaps is all getting ready to have a jolly day ashore, and now Smith says he don't want to go."

"Oh, but I'd rather have him out of the way than anybody else," returned Mrs. Pidgett. "My husband's most particular what we says and does in front of him. He seems to think Smith is quite a gentleman, and he don't like us to—to do any thing at all odd in front of him."

"Well, what I've been thinking, ma'am, is that, if he don't want a holiday, why not make him do some work?"

"But—but I want him out of the way. You promised me——"

"Sort of kill two birds with one stone, ma'am, is what I was thinking of. If Miss Barton was to go off somewhere, she wouldn't be likely to say something awkward, perhaps, in front of Mr. Pidgett by accident about how you've been spending your time. Now, how would it be if you was to suggest to her that she might be taken for a nice long row round the bay this morning, and, perhaps, another nice row out to the cape this afternoon? The water's as smooth as glass, and she'd

enjoy it. And you could tell Captain Dutt to tell Smith to row the boat. That would get 'em both out of the way, wouldn't it, ma'am?"

"That's a splendid idea!" approved Mrs. Pidgett gratefully. "And she could have Mrs. Brockway as a chaperon."

"So she could, ma'am," agreed Mr. Lock rather flatly.

"You might tell Smith to get the boat ready," said Mrs. Pidgett. "And I'll go and see Mrs. Brockway and Miss Barton."

Mr. Lock returned dubiously to Horace and faithfully reported the conversation to him. Mr. Dobb, in no wise disconcerted by mention of Mrs. Brockway, turned at once to Mr. Clark.

"Nip up on deck and see your little sweet'eart," he directed. "Tell 'er you've got the day off, and make an appointment with 'er on Plynhampton pier in an hour's time."

"No fear!" returned Mr. Clark very positively.

"Make it," instructed Mr. Dobb. "You needn't keep it, need you?"

On this understanding Mr. Clark willingly complied with his leader's behest. Hastening on deck he was able to whisper a few imploring words to the stewardess before Mrs. Pidgett claimed her attention, so that the latter lady learned that Mrs. Brockway was of those who never could trust themselves to a small boat for more than the shortest while, and also that Mrs. Brockway had shopping to do ashore and purposed to devote the greater part of the day to it, if Mrs. Pidgett did not mind.

Miss Barton, who had cautiously inquired the identity of the oarsman allotted to her programme, had

professed the greatest pleasure in the prospect of the trip, and was already waiting to enter the boat at the earliest possible moment. Her aunt, doubly reluctant to disappoint her, said that she supposed the absence of a chaperon did not matter in a locality so well provided with telescopes.

So that presently Smith, after another short private colloquy with Horace, began to propel Miss Barton across the estuary. Singularly wooden was the expression on his face, and such of the young lady's countenance as could be glimpsed beneath her open sunshade was marked by a keen interest in everything around her, with the exception of the boatman.

And Horace, descending to the forecastle, there gloated over a one pound note and his own cleverness till at last his shipmates were fully rallied for their holiday ashore. In the second of the ship's boats they set off to Plynhampton, with Mr. Clark affectionately waving to Mrs. Brockway from the stern, and shouting that he would infallibly remember to send a ferryman to fetch her in half an hour's time.

Of the gay, robustious doings of the quartet ashore that morning in Plynhampton's fashionable streets it is superfluous here to write. That their afternoon was snug and happy, though rather quieter, one need merely record and pass on. That early evening found them alert and revived should be too obvious a statement to call for chronicle.

Nine o'clock that same night found them preparing to enjoy the last really free and untrammelled hour of their holiday. Since nightfall they had done their best to add to the gaiety of the town. To select audiences had Mr. Lock performed marvels of bird-mimi-

cry, exploited card tricks, and propounded diverting riddles, while Mr. Tridge had sung many songs in his own dogged and stoic style. Mr. Clark had exhibited prodigies of activity in varied forms of dancing. Mr. Horace Dobb, in addition to acting as leader of the *claque* which rewarded his friends' exertions, also assumed the direction of the programme and the duty of promoting liberality among the company whenever the glasses of the talented amateurs chanced to be empty.

But suddenly Mr. Dobb ejaculated alarmedly, and cut across the harmony of the evening by declaring that he had got to buy a post card. Mr. Tridge, who was grimly trolling forth a sentimental ballad, stopped indignantly to ask what Mr. Dobb wanted a post card for.

"Why, to post," explained Horace. "A nice, pretty, romantical picture post card to send to a young gent."

Mr. Tridge, treating this remark as a mere aberration, allowed his voice to roar and languish again in melody; but Mr. Dobb, rising, went out of the tap-room with an air of fixed purpose, and the simple loyalty of Mr. Lock and Mr. Clark impelled them to follow him.

Mr. Tridge, after a moment of sour indecision, set off in pursuit of his shipmates.

"What's the game?" he demanded, catching up to them. "Did someone come in 'oo knows us too well, or what?"

"I got to buy a picture post card," said Horace firmly.

"What for?" again inquired Mr. Tridge.

Mr. Dobb tapped his temple very significantly with his forefinger, and regarded Mr. Tridge with owlish gravity.

"What does 'e want a post card for?" asked Mr. Tridge, turning to Mr. Lock. "What does 'e want one for?"

"I dunno," admitted Mr. Lock. "But if he comes out of a place before closing time to get a post card, you can reckon he wants one pretty bad!"

"Finishing touch," mentioned Mr. Dobb, with an airy wave of his arm. "Last straw. Just remembered it."

He strode on at the head of his shipmates, ranging the quiet streets for a suitable shop. Once, deceived by a glimmer of light in a window, he knocked at the door for admittance, only to be driven off by a green-grocer who did not include picture post cards among his stock and said so, repeatedly and with great heat. And once Mr. Dobb, beginning to despair, sought useful information from a police constable, and was given the stern, but unhelpful, advice to go straight back to his ship, and not to make such a noise about it either.

Almost tearful was Mr. Dobb when at length the search party came on a small newsagent's shop where the door was still open because the shirt-sleeved young proprietor was taking the air on the step. Him did Mr. Dobb greet with cries of joy, fawning upon him for the privilege of buying a post card.

Close and prolonged scrutiny did Mr. Dobb make from the array spread before him by the proprietor, and it was not till the latter had plainly stated his intention to lock up the shop straightway that the cook's choice at length fell on a pictorial representation of a young couple in amatory embrace beneath a full moon and above a legend of affectionate significance.

"Just the very thing," crooned Mr. Dobb, and paid for the card and carefully stowed it in his pocket.

"Good night, you weak-chinned picture of misery, and thank you very much, bless you!" he ended, going jubilantly off with his comrades.

It was not till he was dressing next morning that he remembered possession of the card. He examined it blankly when he found it in his pocket, and at first was inclined to attribute its presence to practical jocularity on the part of his shipmates, till they described to him the manner of its purchase.

"But what did I want one for?" he mused aloud; but a rather severe headache was clouding his intellect so that, in the end, he could but shake his head and postpone further consideration of the matter.

Meanwhile Mr. Clark, going apprehensively on deck, had at once encountered Mrs. Brockway. To his surprise she began nervously to fold her apron into pleats and addressed him in tones apologetic rather than rebukeful.

"I—hope you didn't wait too long for me on the pier yesterday?" she observed.

"Oh! do you?" he returned, making time for thought.

"I expect you got very impatient?" she surmised.

"P'r'aps I did, and p'r'aps I didn't," he hedged.

"I wonder if you—I suppose you didn't see me about the town nowhere?" she asked with some hesitation.

"P'r'aps I did, and p'r'aps I didn't," he said again.

"Not that there's anything for you to be really upset about," said Mrs. Brockway. "After all, he's my second cousin, and it was quite by chance I met him on the pier."

"Ho!" exclaimed Mr. Clark. "Ho! hindeed?"

"And—and I got talking to him, and somehow we

sat talking and listening to the band, and—and somehow I didn't notice how the time was flying, and when I remembered I'd got to meet you, and went to look for you, you weren't to be seen."

"I took partic'lar good care of that, ma'am," said Mr. Clark stiffly.

"There, I thought you'd seen us together! And then you went and jumped to conclusions!"

"You was walking arm in arm with 'im, ma'am," stated Mr. Clark hardily. "Don't you deny it!"

"Well, he's my second cousin!" she protested.

"After—after me taking all the trouble of sending a ferry-boat to fetch you, too!"

"I didn't wait for the ferry, as it happens. There was a telegram come from Mr. Pidgett, saying he was coming back this morning, and we was to be ready to sail as soon as he come. They brought the telegram in a boat, and I went back ashore with the messenger. And, anyway, you did ought to give me the chance to introduce my cousin to you. I'm sure Alf would have been——"

"Not another word, ma'am!" exclaimed Mr. Clark. "You're welcome to your Alf! I've 'ad my suspicions all along and—and yesterday was a trap I set to catch you. Not another word, ma'am! I've done with you! It's all your fault—any court of law would say that—and I've done with you!"

Mr. Clark, shielding his joyful visage behind his palm, turned and went below again. Here he caused some ill-feeling by repeatedly clapping Mr. Dobb on the back, though, when the stout sailorman explained the reason of his transports, Mr. Dobb atoned for his churlishness by the heartiness of his congratulations to Mr. Clark.

"If this goes on," said Mr. Dobb, "we shall all be as 'appy as a nest of little birds in this fo'c'sle. You ought to see Smith this morning! 'E come thumping me on the back because 'e'd 'ad such a enjoyable day yesterday. Not being a member of the signdikit, it cost 'im 'alf a crown for me to physic my 'eadache presently."

"Talking about signdikits and Smith," said Mr. Clark, "are we any nearer getting that ten pound? Oh, it's all right! I ain't speaking sarcastic. I couldn't speak sarcastic to a living soul this morning!"

"Now I know what that post card was for!" shouted Mr. Dobb. "Smith and the signdikit's funds and the rest of it, of course! 'Ere, Sam, get me a pen and some ink!"

"If you're going to write a letter, you'd better 'urry up if you want to post it from 'ere," counselled Mr. Clark. "We sail as soon as ever Mr. Pidgett comes back."

"All the better. What's the next port o' call?"

"St. Anthony's, round the north of Cornwall somewhere. About a three days' run it ought to be, with the wind where it is."

Mr. Dobb, rolling up his sleeves, sat down at the table and placed the picture post card in front of him. Very carefully he indited an address on it in letters in imitation of print, following each stroke of his pen with a curving movement of his protruded tongue.

"*'Stanley Pidgett, Hesquire,'*" read the engrossed Mr. Clark over his shipmate's shoulder. "*'Jane Gladys, The Post Office, Saint Anthony's, Cornwall. To be called for.'* Very nice and readable! Quite hartistic!"

Mr. Dobb's pen poised for some while over the space

devoted to the needs of correspondence, and it was only when a pendulous drop of ink splashed on to the virgin surface that he ceased to delay.

“*‘Best love to my darling; do not forget the brooch you promised me,’*” again read Mr. Clark, aloud. “*‘Your sweetheart Hilda.’* My eye!” murmured Mr. Clark. “That’s what you might call vinegar and sugar mixed!”

Mr. Dobb blotted the message and then turned the card over again to gaze at its pictured aspect of the tender passion.

“*‘Love me and the world is mine,’*” he observed, quoting the accompanying printed legend. “Beats your conversashion lollipops into a cocked ’at, that does, Sam, my boy!”

“There’s just one thing, though,” said Mr. Clark, perplexed. “Did ’e promise ’er a brooch?”

“Not so far as I know,” replied Mr. Dobb.

“Well, then, why put it in if it don’t mean nothing? ’E’ll know well enough ’e never promised ’er a brooch.”

“The card ain’t for ’im,” explained Mr. Dobb. “It’s to be sent to ’im, but ’e ain’t to get it. It’s ’is pa it’s got to reach, not ’im.”

“But ’is pa don’t know the young lady.”

“All part of the plan, Sam,” tolerantly replied Mr. Dobb. “You’ll see that it’ll work out all right. First of all, don’t forget young Stanley’s popped ’is silver knick-knacks. Then remember we see ’im go into the theatre with a gal ’ose name we took partic’lar care to find out was Hilda. And last night ’e took the same gal to the ’Ippodrome. We see ’im go in with ’er, didn’t we? And Smith’s promised us ten pounds if ’e gets made mate and ’as a scrap with Stanley, ain’t ’e? Very well; you remember them few things, and before we’ve

been at St. Anthony's twenty-four hours you'll be calling me a 'uman marvel!"

At midday Mr. Pidgett returned, and the "Jane Gladys" sailed soon after, but Mr. Dobb's card was already in the post.

CHAPTER XVII

THE "Jane Gladys," having rounded the rocky extreme of Cornwall, was sweeping north-eastward along the fretted coastline towards the coy, venerable little harbour of St. Anthony's.

A heavy, restrained atmosphere prevailed aboard the vessel, and this was because the temper of the owner seemed continually to be condensing into a grey, opaque mass. Almost from the hour of quitting Plynhampton Bay, three days ago, had a mood of sour melancholy settled upon Mr. James Pidgett, tracing a pattern of rigid straight lines on his face and giving to his begrudged conversation a tone of snarling impatience.

Old campaigners, such as Mr. Clark and Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock, very wisely kept out of his orbit as far as possible, finding satisfaction in the thought that they were not of the elect of the saloon and so compelled to endure the blighting presence of Mr. Pidgett all day. Captain Dutt went about softly, and as it were, on a hair-trigger, ready to jump into servile alacrity at the first grunting accents of the owner's voice. Mrs. Pidgett had long retired behind a sort of rampart of stiff resentment, and Mrs. Brockway was frequently to be observed scuttling into the sanctuary of the cabin with her fingers to her ears. Even Smith was not entirely immune from the rasp of Mr. Pidgett's tongue, while the slender Stanley visibly drooped and wilted, from hour to hour, under the malign influence of his sire's ill-humour.

And, secure in his galley, Mr. Horace Dobb, that

unsuspected wizard, preened himself upon the evil spell he had cast over the "Jane Gladys," and viewed the dire results of his necromancy with wicked joy. For, on his return from London, Mr. Pidgett had called for a light meal to be served for himself in the saloon. With calculated malice, Horace had put on the table, among more elaborate fare, a whole loaf of bread new-warm from the baker. Of that loaf, but a bare half remained at the close of the owner's meal. And at tea that same evening a loaf of the same baking had figured for the bread and butter, escaping the notice of Mrs. Pidgett because she had a preference for brown loaves. Also there had been muffins.

Encouraged by the appearance of Mr. Pidgett next morning, Horace had cudgelled his ingenuity. As a result, the rice-pudding that day, of the series which was a standing order, was a marvel of richness, so far as rice-pudding can be rich. Spices and a great disproportion of oleaginous ingredients had been introduced into it, and Mr. Pidgett, despite the vexations beginning to veil his soul, had eaten unsparingly of it. Afterwards, too, he had growled to the cook that he was glad the decent making of a pudding had at last been mastered, and said that he wished the same recipe and procedure to be followed henceforth without variation.

And so the tiny cloud, which was at first but a misty uneasiness of temperament in Mr. Pidgett, spread and thickened till it was a leaden fog which surrounded the whole "Jane Gladys" in gloom.

Mr. Clark coming along the deck and passing the owner warily, as one might pass a dog of known savagery in a narrow lane, saw Horace's beckoning hand behind the galley window and attended on his shipmate at once.

"When are we due at St. Anthony's?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"About four this afternoon," replied Mr. Clark. "I'm going to ask to be allowed to go for a walk when we get there. Me nerves is all gone to bits. Did ever you see such a thunderstorm as the owner? It only wants a drenched Band of 'Ope outing and the pickcher would be complete."

"Oh, the storm ain't broke yet!" said Mr. Dobb. "This is only the glass a-going down. You wait till this afternoon!"

"That there post card——?"

Mr. Dobb nodded.

"I'm going ashore to fetch the letters myself," he said. "I've arranged that all right with the skipper. We ain't stopping long, you know—only just touching to get the owner's post. What's the time now?"

"Getting on for noon."

"And Stanley ain't up yet, is 'e?"

"No, 'e ain't, and I don't blame 'im, neither. 'E won't 'alf catch it, though, when 'e does appear. The owner's been grumbling and growling all the morning about 'im laying in bed. Stanley *says* 'e's got a 'ead-ache. 'Owever, 'is pa don't seem to think so, not by no means."

"Oh, well, the old man would find something to shout at 'im about, whatever 'appened!" returned Mr. Dobb. "So 'e might just as well be blowed up for stopping in bed at the same time. The owner'll give 'im full measure of his tongue, in any case. 'E don't seem to 'ave any patience with 'is angel child nowa-days, thank goodness. By the way, Sam, you know Peter always tidies Stanley's cabin every day? Well,

to-day, I've arranged with Peter to be busy, so *you'll* 'ave to do it."

"Me? What for?"

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Dobb.

It was just before the hour for the midday meal that Mr. Stanley Pidgett made a markedly diffident appearance on deck.

"Oh, so there you are!" cried Mr. Pidgett, in a kind of fierce joy, and bounced towards his son. "A nice hour of the day to come slinking out of your bed! A nice, smart, wideawake young fellow *you* are! Dozing and snoozing away your time like a lazy, loafing——"

"I say, patah!" expostulated Stanley.

"Don't you 'pater' me, sir! I'm sick and tired of your slang! I'm fed up with it! See? And I'm pretty well fed up with you, too! Fed up right to my back teeth!"

"If you only knew how my head was aching——" plaintively murmured Stanley.

"Pooh—stuff—nonsense! Your 'ead ain't the sort to ache. What is there *in* it to ache? Nothing! Nothing! So don't you start whining round me with any of them excuses. The time's come when you—— And what the devil do *you* want?" bellowed Mr. Pidgett, wheeling fiercely round on Mr. Clark, who was ambling forward with eyes that goggled widely.

"I—I just been starting to do Mr. Stanley's cabin, sir. Peter Lock was busy and 'e couldn't wait about no longer, so 'e asked me to do it instead of 'im."

"Well? Well?"

"I believe there's been another burglary, sir!" asserted Mr. Clark.

"What?"

"Thievery, or something of the sort!" declared Mr. Clark. "It's my belief there's a thief 'idden somewhere about the ship, and 'e means to slip off when we gets to St. Anthony's."

"What the deuce do you mean, man?"

"I ain't going to 'ave no blame cast on *me!*" said Mr. Clark. "Soon as ever I found it out——"

"Found what out? Speak sense!" shouted Mr. Pidgett.

"Ain't you missed nothing out of your cabin, sir?" asked Mr. Clark, turning to Stanley.

"I? No. Oh——" said Stanley, and drew in his breath sharply.

"All them beautiful, lovely silver-topped bottles and things, sir, what was on Mr. Stanley's dressing-table, sir! Gone, sir! Clean gone!"

"What?" bawled Mr. Pidgett, and made long strides to his son's apartment.

"What did you want to interfere for, you fat old fool?" Stanley furiously asked Mr. Clark.

"Hinterfere, sir? I was—I was pertecting your interests. And fat I may be sir, and old I can't 'elp being, but 'fool' is very 'arsh and uncalled-for, sir, that I must say."

"Stanley!" called Mr. Pidgett, reappearing in excitement. "Stanley, come here!"

"Oh, Lor'!" wailed Mr. Pidgett, junior. "Now for it!"

Slowly he went to his father, and the pair re-entered the youth's cabin. There was a short wait, and then came a bellowing shout from the owner, and next, five seconds later, Mr. Pidgett darted passionately across to the galley and, wrenching open the door, bawled a question at the cook.

"Certainly I did, sir, and I won't deny it," suavely answered Mr. Dobb. "I only carried out orders, sir. You told us yourself that Mr. Stanley was always to be looked on as boss when you wasn't here. And he particular told me never to tell a soul, otherwise I dare say, sir, old Sam would never 'ave——"

"Urrgh!" trumpeted Mr. Pidgett and dashed back to his son.

He remained closeted with that young gentleman for a full quarter of an hour, and to Mr. Clark, lingering fascinated within earshot, it seemed as if the owner never once stopped for breath. Mrs. Pidgett, hearing something of the outcry, came to listen too, but soon shook her head and stole silently away again.

It was a chastened Mr. Stanley who sat on the deck that afternoon, with his toes close together, his wrists crossed on his lap, and a look of patient suffering on his face.

At four o'clock the "Jane Gladys" anchored off St. Anthony's, and Mr. Horace Dobb and Mr. Joseph Tridge rowed ashore to fulfil certain errands.

At four-fifty Mr. Tridge and Mr. Dobb returned to the vessel. A packet of letters, securely tied round with string, was in Mr. Dobb's hand, and a twinkle in his eye.

At four-fifty-two, Mr. James Pidgett sat down at the saloon table to sort the correspondence Mr. Dobb had brought him.

And at four-fifty-two-and-a-half, Mr. Pidgett's voice roared: "STANLEY!"

Mr. Pidgett, junior, obeyed the summons, sighing as a victim of the Inquisition might have sighed when recalled to the torture chamber.

"What's this?" demanded Mr. Pidgett, and flung a

somewhat vulgar picture post card on the table before Stanley.

"That? Oh, that's—well, I mean it looks like one of those post card affairs people send to each other—what?" hazarded the harassed and perplexed Stanley. "What I mean to say, a picture post card—eh?"

"Any fool can see that's what it is! I want to know what the devil it means!"

"Oh! what it means?" murmured Stanley, still at a loss. "Well, it's a sort of love thing, don't you know. I mean, a couple behaving like that, and all that sort of thing, and then the bit about 'Love me and the world is mine'—I mean, *that* sounds affectionate, and all that kind of rot, so to speak, don't it?"

"It does," grimly agreed Mr. Pidgett.

"Which of the crew is it for?" asked Stanley.

"None of 'em!"

"You don't mean to say it's for Captain Dutt?" asked Stanley. "I *say*!"

"The postmark on the other side is Plynhampton," stated Mr. Pidgett, with a steady stare at his son.

"Oh!" said Stanley, with no great interest in that fact.

"Now look here!" cried Mr. Pidgett. "I don't want no more beating about the bush! Do you or do you not know a young person in Plynhampton, called"—he turned the card over—called 'Hilda'?"

"H-h-h-hilda?" faltered Stanley.

"No lies now!" warned his father. "Do you, or not?"

"I—I did meet a young lady in Plynhampton," admitted Stanley, "and I have a sort of—a sort of idea *her* name was Hilda."

"Well, I'm eternally jiggered!" said Mr. Pidgett, and sat back limply in his chair, with his arms hanging over its sides.

"I—don't quite *see*——" complained Stanley.

"'Best love to my darling'!" quoted Mr. Pidgett, sitting erect again to beat his fists on the table. "'Don't forget the brooch you promised me!' 'Your sweetheart, Hilda'!"

"Captain Dutt seems to—to have been *going* it," ventured Stanley mildly.

"Captain Dutt, you young jackanapes! The post card isn't for him! It's for *you*! Here it is! Look at it!"

"Oh, I *say*!" breathed Stanley limply.

"*Now* what the devil have you got to say for yourself?"

"I—I never promised her a brooch, anyhow," mentioned Stanley. "I—I can't see *why* she should have written to me at all, I—I mean—really"—he ended, looking wistfully towards the door—"well, it's—it's fearful impertience on her part."

Mr. Pidgett rose and locked the door.

"Now you just tell me every word about it," he ordered. "Who this designing young female is, and how you came to meet her, and all the rest of it! What was you thinking about, to forget your cousin Nora like that? Have you written any letters to this young 'ussy in Plynhampton? How long have you known her? Come on, now, tell me *everything*. Come on, now!"

The ordeal of the Third Degree began in earnest.

Meanwhile, Mr. Dobb had sought out Smith.

"Now's your time," he told him elatedly. "If you

means to carry out your words to us, and give us them two fivers for being made mate and a chance to 'ave a few rounds with Stanley, now's your chance!"

"Oh, I don't know that I'm so keen, now that I've thought it over," returned Smith.

"What?" screamed Mr. Dobb. "After all the trouble I've took. That be blowed for a tale!"

"Well, Nora—Miss Barton—told me that he didn't trouble her so very much, and——"

"If she did, it was because she didn't like to cause you no ill-concern of mind," contended Mr. Dobb swiftly. "I could tell a different tale myself, and so could Sam and Joe and Peter if they liked. 'Ere, did Peter ever show you them bits of torn-up notepaper 'e found in Stanley's cabin? Rough copy of a love-letter to 'er, it was, and not 'alf go-a'ead and affectionate neither! Didn't 'e show 'em to you?"

"No!"

"Oh, 'e must 'ave burned 'em, then, in case 'e got 'imself into trouble over it!" said Mr. Dobb glibly. "'Ere, Peter!" he called, summoning Mr. Lock. "What did you do with them bits of love-letter you found in Stanley's cabin. 'Ave you still got 'em, or did you burn 'em?"

"Them bits of love-letter?" questioned Mr. Lock, closely watching Horace's eyes. "Them? Oh, *them*? I burned 'em."

"There you are!" said Mr. Dobb to Smith. "Very loving and affectionate, wasn't they, Peter?"

"Poetry," mentioned Mr. Lock.

"There you are!" said Mr. Dobb again. "Great bits of poetry in a love-letter! That ought to show you, didn't it?"

"*And* ever so many little crosses after he'd signed

his name," added Mr. Lock. "Oh, a real am-a-tory diffusion!"

"Confound him!" growled Smith restively.

"You want to be more on the spot," advised Mr. Dobb. "That 'are-and-tortoise business is too old-fashioned nowadays."

"Well, what do you suggest I should do?" asked Smith.

"Knock 'im out, be made yourself, and make the pace as 'ot as you can," instructed Mr. Dobb.

"And how is that to be done?"

"Listen!" said Mr. Dobb, raising his forefinger.

From the saloon there clearly came the sounds of Mr. Pidgett's voice raised in passionate denunciation and frenzied admonition. Even as they listened, Mr. Pidgett's tones soared higher and higher till it split in a falsetto squeak, only to recommence again in a lower key with undiminished vigour.

"'Ear all that?" said Mr. Dobb. "Well, this is the phisical moment."

"Physiocological moment," gently corrected Mr. Lock.

"Soon as ever Mr. Pidgett comes out of that there saloon, and you see 'alf a chance, you go straight up to 'im and ask 'im something."

"Hardly the right time to ask him anything," demurred Smith.

"That's where you're wrong. There's a right time for everything. You go straight up to 'im and ask if 'e'll run this old boat on Western Ocean lines."

"Well, what does that mean?"

Mr. Dobb explained, and appended to his explanation a few brief instructions for Smith's guidance.

In silence the trio awaited the reappearance of Mr.

Pidgett. They heard his voice growing hoarser and lower by degrees, though occasionally it boomed forth again fitfully for a moment or two with explosive vigour, as a guttering candle may leap in its last moments of light. And at last there was a long, heavy quiet within the saloon, and finally Mr. Pidgett forcefully plucked open the door and began to stride, fretting and fuming, about the deck.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" courageously asked Smith.

"No!" snapped Mr. Pidgett, without stopping. He flung an angry glance at Smith. "Oh, its *you*? Well, what do you want?" he asked ungraciously.

"Do you—er—are you willing to run this ship on Western Ocean lines?" asked Smith.

"What the dickens——! Western Ocean lines?"

"Well, sir, they tell me that on those big ships anyone who can thrash the mate can have his job."

"Thrash the mate—thrash *my* son?"

"That's what I understand, sir."

Mr. Pidgett halted, rammed his hands in his pockets, and looked Smith over from toe to crown. Then he glanced sharply towards the saloon.

"Do the young jackanapes a world of good!" he rasped. "But—but——"

He took a dozen paces and halted again. For a second time he looked on Smith.

"It isn't as if he's just an ordinary sailor," he mused, balancing himself alternatively on his toes and heels. "There's no disgrace in being whopped by a man of good family. All three of us might have a jolly laugh over it, one day, over a whisky and soda. And a jolly good hiding would do that young fool good. And the new mate will be a man of birth. Dare say

he'll like being mate. More fitting to his real station, too. And that confounded young nincompoop of mine deserves——”

He went back to Smith.

“Right you are!” he said. “You prove you can thrash the mate, and you can have his job. And—and don't hurt him any more than there's a real need to.”

And now, in some way, the foreground became permeated by Horace. On his respectful suggestion the combat was timed to take place in ten minutes, when he promised that the ladies of the party should unsuspectingly be starting their tea in the saloon. Also, at his instigation, Mr. Pidgett called Stanley forth and explained the terms of the contest to that youth, who, partly because his perceptions were still numb, and partly because the presence of witnesses permitted no other honourable course, assented wanly to the programme.

A few minutes later, while Mrs. Pidgett was pouring out the first cups of tea, Captain Dutt, as unbiased umpire, called out “Time!” to Smith, and “Time, sir, if you please!” to Stanley.

The gladiators met in the centre of an extemporized ring. It was not a prolonged contest, and it was not an Homeric struggle. As a theatre curtain sweeps down at the end of an act upon one grouping of characters, and lifts in the next moment on a rearranged tableau, so was the fight divided into two stages. At one second, Smith and Stanley were facing each other with raised fists, with Captain Dutt craning intently forward to watch them, while Mr. Pidgett looked grimly on with folded arms and the cook and his friends were nudging each other in happy anticipation. In the next second, Stanley was prone on the deck, with Smith

looking down at him rather apologetically, while Captain Dutt had begun to count aloud. Mr. Pidgett was smiling, with his lips set in a half-satisfied, half-contemptuous manner, and the comrades of the forecastle were openly grinning their pleasure in Stanley's *débâcle*.

"Three—four—five——" counted Captain Dutt.

Stanley, lying on his back with his eyes wide open, was clearly giving interest only to the progress of the skipper's counting.

"Six—seven—eight——" went on Captain Dutt.

The youth recumbent on the deck made no attempt to move.

"Nine—ten!" finished the skipper, and at once Stanley slowly began to rise, caressing the point of his chin and scowling darkly at Smith.

"Shake hands!" directed Mr. Pidgett.

"Dashed if I do!" said Stanley and skulked off.

"Come back!" shouted Mr. Pidgett, incensed, but Stanley held on his way into his cabin and slammed the door.

Mr. Smith's acquaintances of the forecastle patted him on the back and voiced their congratulations.

"Henceforth *you're* mate of the ship," Mr. Pidgett told Smith. "Hope you'll like the job."

"Go below and get your things," directed the skipper, "and bring 'em along to my cabin. You'll have to share that with me in future."

Attended by his shipmates, Smith went down to the forecastle, where his first act was to liquidate an obligation to the syndicate.

"Another ten quid for 'Orace & Co.,'" jubilantly cried Mr. Dobb. "Do you know, I reckon we ought to be going about in top 'ats and white spats, like all them other fynancierys."

Smith, going on deck with his portmanteau, was accosted by Mr. Pidgett.

"Very neat job you made of it," said the owner. "But if I'd known how he was going to take it, I'd have got you to give him a bit more. Well, and now you've got your new job, is there anything else I can do for you? Don't be afraid to ask, man."

"Well, it's very good of you, but, really, sir——"

"Look here, while we're about it, what about a few days off to go and see your people, eh?"

"No, thank you, sir, I'd much rather remain here."

"As you wish. Only I don't want you to have any ill-will over the way that young cub of mine took his licking. I don't want nothing like that to spoil your stay on the 'Jane Gladys'."

"Oh, I'm having a splendid time, sir!"

"That's good," returned Mr. Pidgett. "But look here, you've got friends. Why not invite some of them to join us. I'm only a plain man, I know, though I've met Sirs and Markisses before to-day at company meetings, but—— Well, look here, Smith, I can see as far through a brick wall as most people. I know well enough you ain't what you pretend to be."

Smith coughed uneasily, but Mr. Pidgett patted him reassuringly on the shoulder.

"Don't you trouble," said the owner. "You can look on me as your friend. I'd like to see you settled back in your proper place in life. Anything I can do to help you, I'll do willingly. If there's anything you want, now's your time to ask."

Smith, still flushed by success and anxious to make the most of this favourable opportunity, suffered a grave lapse in discretion.

"Well, sir," he said, "I'd very much like to marry Miss Barton, if you don't mind."

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR a long while, Mr. Pidgett stared in speechless surprise at the young man before him.

"You want to marry my niece?" he asked at length. "That is what you said, isn't it? *You* want to——"

"Yes, sir, I want to marry Miss Barton. I want that more than anything else in the world."

"But—but I had no idea——" protested Mr. Pidgett, shaking his head uncomprehendingly. "Very sudden, ain't it?"

"Er—well—not altogether," replied Smith.

"Has *she* any idea? Does *she* know anything about it?"

"Oh, *rather!* Well, I mean, she—she *knows*, of course!"

"Oh, she does, does she?" exclaimed Mr. Pidgett. "Well, it's a surprise to *me*, anyway—a great surprise!"

"Perhaps I ought to have waited a little longer," said Smith, beginning to repent his impulsiveness.

"I don't know what to say about it," observed Mr. Pidgett. "As a matter of fact, I dare say you must have guessed I meant my own son to make a match with her. I don't mind saying I'd set my heart on it. But—— Well, it's a bit of a staggerer. I don't quite know how to go on about it."

"I—I could promise Miss Barton a comfortable home, and—and all that sort of thing, sir," pleaded Smith.

"Oh, I don't doubt that, my boy! I'm not denying it wouldn't be a very good match for her. A brilliant match, for that matter, marrying into a family like yours. I'm her uncle, and her guardian, too, practically, and I don't want to stand in her way. But—well, I wanted her and my Stanley to pair off, and this knocks that idea on the 'ead. As I say, it knocks it on the *h-head*."

"Mr. Stanley is very young, sir. He'd soon get over it."

"Oh, I've no doubt he would! But me and his ma would have a rare job to find him another young lady who'd make just the right kind of wife for him as Nora would. Oh, *he'd* get over it soon enough. Why, it would pretty well console him if you asked him to be best man at the wedding. He'd get over his disappointment pretty quick in his excitement at the idea of having his photograph in all the society papers in a pot hat and white waistcoat. Oh, I've got no delusions left about *him*! It's the spoiling of the plans me and his ma have made for him that I can't lose sight of."

"I quite understand that, sir, but——"

"And then again, how will your family take it? Nora's the equal of any lady in the land, but there's no blinking the fact that your family and ours don't move in the same set, not by no means. And I ain't going to have Nora snubbed for marrying out of her class."

"Oh, I don't see there's the slightest chance of that, sir," urged Smith. "I admit her surroundings are bound to be a bit different if she marries me, but there's nothing I wouldn't do to make her comfortable and happy and——"

"All very well, my boy, but I know something of

the world, you know, though I am only a self-made man, as they say. Suppose your folks start patronizing her, eh?"

"There's no earthly reason why they should!" declared the young man. "I'm sure they'll welcome Nora to the family. How *could* they patronize her because she happens to be the niece of—of a financial magnate?"

"Well, of course, looked at from that point of view," returned Mr. Pidgett, with a certain restored complacency, "it don't seem reasonable. After all, as far as money goes, I dare say I could give Nora as good a start as any nobleman's daughter, but——"

"Oh, we don't want to talk about that," said Smith quickly. "In fact, I'd far rather Nora didn't bring any money with her. We could get along quite well without it and——"

"I've no doubt you could," agreed Mr. Pidgett. "But we could talk about that some other time. Sometimes estates ain't so snug as they look when you come to examine 'em close, you know. Mortgages, cutting down the timber, that sort of thing. But we're going ahead much too fast. The main point is you want to marry Nora and I can't make up my mind what to say about it."

"Why, say you consent, sir, and there's no need to say any more."

"Yes, but what will your father say about it? You ought to consult him, you know. It's your duty."

"Oh, my father won't raise any objections, sir. You can be sure about that. He lets me go my own way."

"Come to think of it," said Mr. Pidgett, "didn't he make a fuss about some other young lady you fell in love with? Got other ideas for you, hadn't he?"

"First I've heard of it, sir. Why, there never was any 'other young lady' before Miss Barton."

"I heard different. Only a rumour, maybe. I know how rumours do spread about you young men-about town. Anyway, you have quarrelled with your father about something, now, haven't you? Now don't deny that! It's owing to a quarrel with your father that you're here on this ship, isn't it?"

"Oh, the gov'nor and I often quarrel, in a mild way, but it's very soon made up again. But it's no quarrel with him that brought me aboard here, as perhaps you can guess now."

"You'd have to be reconciled to him before ever I could think of a wedding. I ain't going to give him the chance of saying you were trapped while you were hard up and couldn't very well help yourself. No, you'll have to make it up with the markiss before anything else, my boy!"

"The marquis?" queried Smith in surprise.

"The Markiss o' Brighton—that's who I mean."

"But what's he got to do with it?"

"Now, come, come, my boy, you needn't keep up that *sub rosa in cog*, disguised business any longer! I know who you are well enough. Known it ever since you've been with us. So's Stanley! Him and me knew who you really was, right from the start, though we never told anybody else. You're the Honourable Something Worthing, son of the Markiss o' Brighton!"

"I am?" gasped the other. "You think I'm the—— Now I see why you've treated me so decently, why you've given me such an easy time! But—but you're making a big mistake, I'm not the Honourable anybody!"

"Then who the devil are you?" roared the owner.

"Well, I dare say you've heard of me, though we haven't, so to speak, met before," said the young man, backing a little. "I mean—well, of course we've met before on this boat, but——"

"Who—are—you?"

"Well, my name's Wayfield—er—Clifford Wayfield!"

"What?" screamed the owner.

"Ah, I see, you *have* heard of me!" murmured the other nervously. "You see, Mr. Pidgett, it was like this—I just had to—well, I mean, I couldn't think of any other way and——"

"Don't you dare to stand there talking to me another moment!" shouted the owner. "Of all the confounded impertinence and cheek! Coming aboard *my* ship to—to make love to my niece! Crawling and sneaking aboard here to be near Miss Barton! And then having the dashed impudence to ask me—*me!*—to give my consent——"

"It was a bit rash," agreed the young man, recovering a little spirit. "Fairly plucky, though, don't you think?"

"Get out of my sight, you beggarly advertisement-cavasser or lawyer or clerk, or whatever it is!"

"Chartered accountant, sir," politely supplied the other.

"Then get back to your red ink and rulers! A fine job yours must be if you can afford to waste week after week knocking about as a common sailorman!"

"Well, I admit there isn't exactly a rush of business," conceded he who must henceforth be known as Wayfield. "But I've got hopes, and a good clerk, and a private income. I'd like to suggest that those are helps to a man. Rome, you know, sir, Rome! They

took time over housing schemes even in those days, you know, sir.

"Pah! Don't try to be funny, sir!"

"It is a bit difficult, in the circumstances," admitted Wayfield regretfully.

"You talk about 'private income.' How much have you got?"

Well, it brings in between eight and nine hundred at present, sir."

"Good Lor', and he calls that 'income' in these days!" bellowed Mr. Pidgett. "And he asks my niece, accustomed to every luxury, to share *that* with him! Get out of my sight, man! Pack your portmanteau, there, and get off this ship—now—at once! I won't have you aboard another hour! We'll be sailing again in a few minutes, and if you ain't gone by then——"

"But look here, sir——"

"Dutt!" shouted the owner. "Captain Dutt, where the dickens are you? Oh, there you are! Well, have this chap put in the boat and rowed ashore at once, will you? At once! See!"

Mr. Pidgett strode off furiously. Then suddenly he turned and came back with a malevolent, ominous scowl.

"Wait a bit," he directed. "I just thought of something. He came aboard here to please himself, didn't he? Well, now he can stop, because *I* want him to. He's signed on with us, ain't he, and can't leave without notice, can he? Very well, then let him take his bag back down below with them other fellows. There he belongs and there he can stop till I've done with him. And get the anchor up at once!"

"Very good, sir," answered the skipper. "If the wind holds we shall be in Swansea Bay in no time."

"Never mind about Swansea Bay or any other stopping place," said the owner. "I've changed my mind. You take us out to sea, and keep on and on till I tell you to stop. I don't mean to give anyone the slightest chance of leaving this boat yet awhile."

The skipper, summoning the crew, began preparations for instant departure. The owner, a grim, menacing figure, stood motionless among all the hustle, and it was only when the sails were fully set and the "Jane Gladys" was beginning to draw away from St. Anthony's that he spoke again.

"And now look here, Captain Dutt," he said. "I want you to see that that man works, that chap who calls himself Smith, there. Never mind so much about the others. See that Smith does his share and a bit over. I've treated him mistaken in the past, but now I'm going to see that he makes up for that mistake. Don't give him a minute's more rest than you can help. Keep him on the go night and day. Let him go to bed tired and get up tired. Don't have no mercy on him! *I'm* not going to. He—he ran his head into the lion's mouth of his own accord, and now he's got to put up with the consequences. And if he ain't sick and sorry for himself before he's much older, my name ain't James Pidgett!"

He nodded emphatically, stared with the utmost hostility at Wayfield, and strutted off.

"Oh, well," said Mr. Dobb, philosophically to Mr. Lock, "it's an ill wind that don't blow nobody a little bit of good! Smith's booked for a real sticky time, I can see, but it wouldn't surprise me in the least if it all turned out well, somehow, in the end—well for 'Orace & Co.,' I mean."

CHAPTER XIX

SIX days of intensive cultivation had done much to obscure the natural charm of Mr. Clifford Wayfield. Now, as he went forlornly about the deck, he bore strong family resemblance to those effigies with which small boys are wont to parade the streets on the fifth day of November.

Malevolent conspiracy on the part of his superiors had devised all manner of untidy tasks for him, from the sweeping of flues to the whitewashing of pantries, with an occasional spell at applying red lead and green paint by way of chromatic variation. Also he had been compelled to extensive bouts of board-scrubbing and brass-polishing and lamp-cleaning. All these exercises had left their mark on his wardrobe, and there had been, in addition, accidental evils suffered from projecting nails and oil-containers that oozed and treacherous tins of varnish.

So that speedily Mr. Wayfield's outward appearance had become more and more speckled and disreputable, and constant kneeling made the legs of his nether garments sag in an unfashionable way which caused him much secret distress.

In dogged effort to preserve sightliness in the view of his charmer, he had rung the changes on the contents of his portmanteau as far as possible. A lack of trained expertness, and the absence of mind which comes of melancholy had, however, conspired to thwart his attempts, and one outfit after another had joined

the ranks of the ruined till not one remained smart and unsullied.

And now, in a state which made even Mr. Samuel Clark, in his oldest suit, appear trim and modish by comparison, Mr. Wayfield toiled about the deck, condemned to this shameful publicity by the ire of the envenomed Mr. Pidgett. Usually the owner sat in grim state, watching his victim with savage satisfaction, but often he would come to stand over Wayfield to criticize his work and make grim mockery of his degradation.

Frequently it had struck Wayfield that life could offer nothing sweeter and more abundantly satisfying to him than a swift rising to his feet and the accurate planting of a fist upon Mr. Pidgett's undistinguished features. It was an idea which captured Wayfield's imagination, and sometimes, when he appeared to be engrossed in the sweep of his paint-brush, he was really absorbed in considering whether it would be more gratifying to smite the owner on his nose, or on his right eye, or on his left eye.

Something of these calculations he mentioned in the forecastle on the second evening after his downfall. Mr. Lock at once warned him of the danger he ran, declaring that such an assault laid him open to charges varying from disorderly conduct to mutiny on the high seas. Mr. Samuel Clark, however, stated a belief that the First Offenders' Act would indemnify Mr. Wayfield. All next day the stout mariner hung about, fascinated, whenever Mr. Pidgett approached Wayfield, and at nightfall he bitterly remarked that the present generation had no enterprise.

For Wayfield mastered temptation and mutely submitted to his punishment, finding solace in discovering

Miss Barton's gaze fixed upon him with the utmost sympathy whenever she appeared in the open. That her uncle had spoken to her of the matter was evident by her deportment. Indeed, Mrs. Brockway privately told Mr. Dobb that the interview between uncle and niece had been a spirited affair, with Miss Barton obstinately refusing to admit regrets or make promises until Mr. Pidgett had enforced a victory by threatening to cut off all future supplies to the young lady's mother.

But Wayfield was not the only victim on the "Jane Gladys" to Mr. Pidgett's anger. Mr. Stanley Pidgett, too, was under the lash. Coming in sequence to the matter of the silver fittings of the dressing-case and the revelations concerning the existence of the damsel Hilda at Plynhampton, Stanley's share in establishing Wayfield's mistaken identity brought Mr. Pidgett to the very apex of volcanic passion.

In vain had the harassed Stanley sought to exculpate himself by stating that it was from Mr. Lock that he had derived the story that Wayfield was in reality the son of the Marquis of Brighton.

Mr. Lock, cross-examined by the owner, had convincingly contended that it was quite the other way. Indeed, he repeated portions of his conversation with Stanley, and made it clear that the youth had begun by asserting that he plainly recognized the soi-distant "Smith" as an aristocratic club-mate. Mr. Lock confessed that he had a faint idea that he had seen Wayfield somewhere before, but pleaded a faulty memory, and said that he had simply accepted Stanley's word as to the identity of the new-comer.

And persuaded in the end by Mr. Lock's plausibility, Mr. Pidgett had returned, ravening, to his son,

convinced that here was another of Stanley's idiocies. Over the head of that devoted youth he had poured the vials of his wrath, and then had gone on to break the vials and rub their sharp fragments forcefully into his son's skull.

Grey as life had been growing for Stanley, existence was now turned into black affliction for him. At every opportunity his father rasped the savagest of rebukes and comments at him, and under the crushing weight of his sire's relentless anger the personality of the once-magnificent youth crumpled and flattened day by day, till he became an utterly dispirited, cringing object, not far removed from tears.

And thus, of late, the "Jane Gladys" had held joylessly on her course, with Mr. Pidgett dividing his devastating attentions between Wayfield and Stanley, searing the soul of each in turn with scorn and jibe and insult, leaving one in helpless exasperation and going to the other to make him welter in plaintive emotions, and keeping both tyrannies under way as steadily as a performer juggles with two billiard balls.

It was on the evening of the sixth day of the devout lover's martyrdom, when the owner had snarled a final warning at him and had gone to supper and his other victim, that Mr. Dobb stealthily called Wayfield into the galley.

Mr. Joseph Tridge was there already, and both he and the cook shook their heads in commiseration at Wayfield when he entered.

"Mind if I sit down?" wearily asked Wayfield. "Thanks. Don't be alarmed at any creaking noises—it's only my joints. Phew! I feel just like one of those 'Before Taking' photos in the patent medicine advertisements."

"I reckon it's a thundering shame!" observed Mr. Tridge. "'E's got you at 'is mercy, and 'e don't mean to show you none. A blessed old Nero, that's what 'e is!"

"Nero was fond of music," returned Wayfield, "but this old blighter hasn't a single redeeming feature of any sort."

"You 'ave this nice 'ot drop of coffee, chum," urged Mr. Dobb solicitously. "You'll feel better after it. I just made it specially for you."

Wayfield, gratefully taking the proffered liquid, sipped at it with relish. Mr. Dobb and Mr. Tridge, glancing occasionally at each other, waited in silence till he put down the empty cup with a sigh of enjoyment.

"What I mean to say is," remarked Horace, softly, "you mustn't think you got no friends aboard 'ere at all."

"Far from it," supported Mr. Tridge. "Us chaps below 'ave got any amount of sympathy with you, only we can't do nothing to 'elp, you know. At least——"

"Me and Joe 'ave been talking things over quiet," said Mr. Dobb, raising a hand to suppress his shipmate. "I don't mind saying it's worried us no end that we couldn't do nothing to 'elp you."

"Very good of you," murmured Wayfield.

"Not a bit of it," denied Horace. "You been a good friend to us chaps in the past, always very free and willing with your money and——"

"And we thought that p'r'aps, if we could 'elp you again, you'd be willing to——"

"You leave this to me, Joe," curtly ordered Mr. Dobb. "I'll do all the explaining necessary. As I was saying, chum, it's worried us, not being able to help

you. Why, old Sam Clark was actually moaning about it in 'is sleep, only last night, so that shows you, don't it?"

"And Peter Lock says, if only we was to put in at a foreign port, we could all go in a body and see the British Consul about it. As it is, though, the law's tricky, and it's difficult to see what can be done at English ports," said Mr. Tridge. "'Owever, me and 'Orace 'ave thought of——"

"What I was saying to Joe was this," interrupted Mr. Dobb. "'Ow would it be if you was to commit suicide?"

"Rotten!" tersely replied Wayfield.

"I don't really mean commit suicide," elucidated the cook. "Simply purtend to do it."

"Disappear," amplified Mr. Tridge. "Make the owner *think* you've done away with yourself!"

"But I'd have to come to life again some day," objected Wayfield. "And he'd be savager with me than ever, then. I'd have to keep on committing suicide and coming to life again, to do any good."

"Look 'ere, it's no good taking it lightly like that," counselled Mr. Dobb. "You're 'aving a pretty serious time, and you're likely to go on 'aving it, as far as I can see, so you've got to be 'ave according."

"The owner don't mean to give you a chance to hes-cape for a very long while," said Mr. Tridge. "'E's going to give you a lesson what'll last a lifetime, 'e says, don't 'e?"

"He says it repeatedly," confirmed Mr. Wayfield. "He's made quite a habit of it."

"Yes, well, and this afternoon I heard 'im ask the skipper 'ow we was off for stores and water and so on. And the skipper told 'im, and 'e's going to arrange to

'ave a lighter sent out to 'im, three miles out to sea, with fresh supplies, and then 'e talks about a straight run down the Mediterranean, without stopping nowhere."

"That's a cheerful prospect," said Wayfield.

"What you'll look like after another three weeks or so—" remarked Mr. Dobb, shaking his head.

"And what I'll *feel* like!" sighed Wayfield. "But I'll stick it. I'll go through with it, whatever happens. He's not going to frighten me off so easily. I'm in love, I admit, and love's a big help. For a girl like Miss Barton I'd——"

"This ain't the time to talk love," said Mr. Dobb. "This is the time to talk *sense*. Suppose you go right through with it, 'ow will that 'elp you? When 'e's cooled down and got tired of bully-ragging you, 'e'll just put you ashore somewhere and be done with you. Then what are you going to do?"

"Well, that *is* a bit of a problem," conceded Wayfield.

"Now, suppose you follows the idea I've been putting to Joe," argued Mr. Dobb. "You disappears, and gives 'im the impression that you've done away with yourself. See 'ow that puts 'im in a corner at once. 'E'll think at once that it was 'is treatment of you that drove you to it. And 'e'll know us chaps will be able to give evidence against 'im. 'E'll be at his wits' ends 'ow to get out of the mess. Then, when 'e's 'ad time properly to understand the nasty persition 'e's in, *you* pops up to life again."

"And he sees he's been hoodwinked, and treats me worse than ever," said Wayfield. "No, thank you."

"Ah, but that's where you are wrong! 'E'll be so 'appy and relieved at seeing you alive and well that

'e'll reg'lar jump for joy. 'E'll make it up with you. and treat you decent ever after, and you'll get a big 'elp forward with your love business you're so set on."

"I'm afraid his conduct isn't in the least likely to be like that," said Wayfield. "He's not that sort."

"You never can tell what sort a man is," replied Mr. Dobb sententiously, "not till you've put 'im in unexpected corners. After all, 'e'll 'ave been seeing 'imself as next door to a murderer for days, and 'e'll see 'ow harsh and cruel and unreasonable 'e's been treating you, and it's a 'undred to one 'e'll come right round and show 'is remorse by letting you get engaged to 'is niece."

"It ought to be worth trying for that alone," artfully put in Mr. Tridge. "After all, if I was a young chap in love, I'd take a good many chances to get my gal, even if they didn't look a bit likely. You never know your luck, you know."

"Yes, that's so," admitted Mr. Wayfield dubiously. "But then I *do* know Mr. Pidgett, you see. If I thought there was half a chance of things panning out as you suggest, I'd take it, but——"

"Faint 'eart never yet did 'imself any good when 'e went courting," paraphrased Mr. Tridge.

"Besides which," said Mr. Dobb, "you'll 'ave 'ad a few days complete rest, won't you? You'll be that to the good, in any case."

"By Jove, you're right there; and I can do with a rest! I believe I could sleep six weeks straight off, without any effort."

"There you are, then," exclaimed Mr. Dobb as though the matter was settled. "You does as we advise, and you gets a nice long rest, *and* a chance of

bringing the owner round to see things different. What more do you want?"

"Well, but suppose the things only makes him more savage?" demurred Wayfield. "What then?"

"Ah! what then, indeed?" challenged Mr. Dobb. "'E can't treat you any worse, can 'e?"

"No, I don't suppose he can," agreed Wayfield. "Otherwise I suppose he would."

"Looked at from the right point of view," said Mr. Tridge, "it's a real bit of sport. A chap like you ought to think it a reg'lar lark to fool the owner like that. And, supposing 'e does cut up rustier than ever when you comes back to life, you can make 'im look sillier than ever, if you like. I mean, supposing 'is treatment of you does become unbearable, and you really commits suicide—that'll show 'im up proper, then, won't it? The laugh'll be with you, all right, won't it?"

"And what good will that do me?" asked Wayfield coldly.

"It'll teach 'im a lesson any'ow," returned Mr. Tridge.

"Oh, I don't think we want to go quite as far as that, not at present," interposed Horace. "But, look 'ere, chum, you be guided by me, and you'll come out all right in the end, take my word for it!"

"The idea of a nice long rest, I must say, is alluring."

"'Course it is," asserted Mr. Dobb. "You take the chance while you've got enough interest left in life to 'elp you through."

"But perhaps I could get a rest by—by being taken ill, or something like that?" suggested Wayfield.

"Out of the frying-pan into the fire," said Horace. "The owner's got a book about illnesses and a chest of medicine, don't forget. There's nothing 'e'd like better than to physic you according to 'is own ideas. No, me and Joe 'ave thought it all out, and what I've told you is your only 'ope."

"I believe you're right, and I'm just about dead tired, so I can't argue. I'll trust to luck, and take your advice."

"You will? Wise feller!" approved Horace. "Why, your troubles is now as good as at an end. And don't you worry about the young lady. Me and Joe will get word to 'er some'ow that you're in 'iding and quite safe. All you've got to do is take life easy for a bit, and leave it to your pals—which is us chaps in the fo'c'sle—to watch your hinterests."

"And, of course, if you *should* want to make some little recognition——" murmured Mr. Tridge.

"I'll see that you don't lose by it," promised Wayfield.

"Meaning——" bluntly asked Mr. Tridge.

"Well, we'll see how it turns out," replied Wayfield.

"Good enough, and spoke like a gent!" commended Horace. "Though I must say, Joe, I'm surprised at you for worrying 'im about trifles when——"

"Why, it was *you*——" Mr. Tridge hotly began to defend himself. "Didn't you say as we ought to——"

"Well, when and where do I go into seclusion?" asked Wayfield. "And how do I get on about food?"

"Don't you trouble yourself about anything," returned Mr. Dobb. "We've thought all that out for you. You'll disappear to-night. 'Ow long you'll stay 'idden depends on 'ow things goes on. But me and Joe or one of the others will keep you supplied with

food, and we'll let you know regular 'ow matters is progressing."

"Know that 'old for'ard—the big, deep one where the 'eavy stuff is stored?" asked Mr. Tridge. "That's where we're going to keep you. There's one or two spare sails down there, what you can make yourself comfortable on, and you can take some blankets down with you. You'll be as snug as snug."

"Yes, I ought to be all right there. It's fairly roomy, and there's plenty of odd corners to hide in if anybody should come down there by chance."

"You go and get your blankets and things together," directed Horace, "and slip down here first chance you get. You can leave the rest to me and Joe. There's no need to write a farewell note, or anything like that. We'll see to everything for you. You just get down there and keep there, and we'll see you 'ave all the food and news you want. Soon as ever the coast is clear, each night, one or other of us will pay you a call. Now, off you go!"

Wayfield rose and stood hesitating a second or two. He yawned involuntarily, and movement of his aching arms and shoulders made him wince. Then he smiled, and, remarking that no further argument in favour of a rest was needed, he went out of the galley.

"*That's settled*, thank goodness!" said Mr. Tridge, and gustily sighed with relief. "What do you reckon it out to be worth to the signdikit, 'Orace?"

"Can't say off'and—it depends. We may not give 'im the chance of seeing 'ow Pidgett takes it. It may pay us a jolly sight better to smuggle 'im off the boat altogether, and leave 'im be'ind somewheres. We might even find it worth while to get 'im Shanghaied and sent foreign."

"Oh, well, I dare say you know best," remarked Mr. Tridge, without the slightest sign of protest against his shipmate's proposal. "Do as you think for the best, by all means, though I don't see quite 'ow it would benefit us."

"Why, if the owner thinks a suicide really 'as been done on this boat, 'e'd be pretty certain to take a dislike to it, wouldn't 'e? 'E'd want to get rid of it, and then *we* might be able to come to very good terms with 'im for it—'specially since we've got 'im in the 'ollow of our 'ands, so to speak."

"I see! 'E'd fancy we might turn King's evidence against 'im, or something like that? Ah, 'Orace, you're a deep 'un! I'd rather be your friend than your enemy, any day."

"It'll take a bit of arranging, but we'll manage it all right, if there's 'alf a chance," complacently declared Horace. "Anyway, we've made a good start by persuading this chap to disappear. Next thing is to see that 'e's safely stowed away in the 'old, and then I'll talk to Sam and Peter and fix up the programme for to-night's doings. 'For one night only,' " he ended, chuckling. "'Special benefit performance in aid of 'Orace & Co.'!"

CHAPTER XX

IT was a calm, muggy night, moonless and very dark. Captain Dutt, with his back braced comfortably against the wheel, was but a deeper shade bulking vaguely against the blue-blackness. Mr. Samuel Clark, to speak euphemistically, was keeping watch up in the bows, and was quite invisible save during those brief moments when the upward glow from his pipe revealed the swelling curves of his plump cheeks and touched the end of his nose to a warmer red.

All was silent on the "Jane Gladys." The saloon lights had been extinguished early that evening, and no ray of illumination had come from any of the cabin port-holes for an hour past.

It was just on midnight when, from the forecastle, there came the sound of a cough. It was not a distressed cough, nor the casual easing of a dry throat, but a clear, deliberate cough, and, as soon as he heard it, Mr. Clark tapped his pipe out and grunted softly to himself.

A minute later Mr. Horace Dobb coughed again, and at once quietude departed from the "Jane Gladys," and her deck became a scene of crescendo turmoil.

"'Ere, hi!" bellowed Mr. Clark, stampeding tumultuously amidships. "'Ere, hi! Look out there! Whatcher doing? Hi!"

"'Ullo!" cried the skipper, startled into complete wakefulness. "'Ullo! What's the matter?"

Mr. Clark, still vociferating alarmedly, cantered to

the side and leaned over in an endeavour to peer through the surrounding darkness.

"What's the matter?" called Captain Dutt. "'Ave you been dreaming, Sam? What's the matter? What's——"

"Didn't you see 'im?" shouted Clark.

"See 'oo? See what?"

"'Im! I don't know 'oo 'e was! *I* see 'im! Climbed up just 'ere, 'e did, and jumped overboard."

"I never see nothing," returned the skipper.

"I did. And I 'eard the splash, quite plain! *Man overboard!*" yelled Mr. Clark. "MAN OVERBOARD!"

He seized a lifebelt and flung it overboard, haphazard. The skipper, vigorously plying the wheel, brought the "*Jane Gladys*" head to the light wind, and the snail's pace at which she had been moving fell away from her and she lay motionless on the inky water.

"Man overboard!" again bellowed Mr. Clark, and continued so to bellow with a certain enjoyment.

Mr. Dobb, in tactful deshabelle, was the first to respond to the call, and Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock followed close after him. They signalized their arrival by joining in the cry of "*Man overboard!*" with great gusto, but beyond that, they did little towards easing the situation.

And then Mr. Pidgett appeared, barefooted and in pyjamas, and with an unexpected, archaic, red-flannel petticoat draped across his shoulders.

Captain Dutt, making a megaphone of his palms, roared a sequence of orders, and the four comrades of the forecastle flitted divers ways in obedience to his instructions. Light after light sprang into being about

the ship. From the davits a boat plopped on to the still surface of the water.

Amid this panting, scurrying activity the figures of three ladies of the party appeared remotely and discreetly in the background, but the form of Stanley remained absent from the stirring scene.

Mr. Dobb and Mr. Tridge, at their skipper's instructions, tumbled into the boat. Mr. Tridge took the oars and began to pull away with a will. Horace, at the prow with a lighted hurricane lamp, swung its rays this way and that in scrutiny of the surrounding sea. In widening circles went the search party, the progress of its yellow beacon watched anxiously by all left on board.

Mr. Lock, sidling along, ranged himself next to the owner and Captain Dutt, where they stood staring in strained silence at the distant lantern with its message of succour.

"Poor fellow," sighed Mr. Lock aloud.

Mr. Pidgett flung a troubled, harried glance at the sailorman and then looked out into the night again.

"Poor fellow," repeated Mr. Lock, and sighed again. "Little did I think he meant it."

The owner, plucking agitatedly at his homely mantle, forebore from speech.

"I thought it was just a sort of burst of temper," went on Mr. Lock. "I never took any real notice of it. If I had——"

"Wh-what did he say?" queried Mr. Pidgett.

"Well, I hardly like to tell you, sir," said Mr. Lock.

"Wh-wh-what did he say? I w-want to know."

"Well, he said something about not being able to stand it any more, sir. And he said he had a jolly good mind to make a hole in the water."

"Oh, dear!" murmured Mr. Pidgett wretchedly.
"Oh, dear!"

"Yes, sir. And he said life wasn't worth living and he had had enough of it. Just before he turned into his bunk that was. And he come and shook hands, very sorrowful, with me."

"You—you—you ought to have spoken at once about it to Captain Dutt."

"Ah, I know I ought to have—*now*, sir!" ruefully admitted Mr. Lock. "Only I was a bit sleepy, and I didn't take particular notice. I dare say his face ought to have warned me, though. I shall never forgive myself for not taking more notice of him. Never. I can see his face now, all drawn and pale and tired and——"

"Oh! what's the good of talking about it?" cried the overwrought owner. "Why the devil didn't you stop him? Why the devil didn't Captain Dutt stop him? What was *he* doing? What the deuce was you thinking of, Dutt, to let him jump over? Why couldn't you——"

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I never see nor 'eard 'im," replied Captain Dutt. "I'd got my mind fixed on the wheel, carrying out my dooty. Besides which, it was pitch dark and——"

"Clark saw him, anyhow."

"Clark was look-out man. It was his dooty to see *everything*. I can't steer, sir, and keep a look-out, too, on a night like this. First I knew what was up was when Clark begun shouting and flung a lifebelt over."

"Well, that ought to have warned you something was up."

"It did, sir. But it was too late then. If Clark 'ad only managed to get to 'im *before* 'e jumped overboard——"

"I suppose Clark was quite sure he did see somebody jump over? After all, it's a dark night, and he might only have fancied it. How do we know the chap really went overboard? Clark might 'ave been dreaming it. There ain't any proof he went overboard, is there?"

"Well, 'e ain't 'ere, is 'e, sir?" suggested the skipper.

"He might still be asleep in his bunk," argued the owner, clearly clutching at hope. "It's quite likely. He'd be sure to be a—a bit tired and sleepy. He might be lying snug asleep in his bunk this moment, and us making a lot of fuss without any reason for it. Did anybody look in his bunk to make sure?"

"Why, I never had time to, sir," said Mr. Lock. "I come running straight up, soon as ever I 'eard——"

"Then you go and have a look, now, at once. Go on! Hurry up! Don't stand waiting about! Get off, at once, now!"

Mr. Lock, departing, remained below for some while, and the owner, arguing the best from this, came back to something of his normal assertiveness. But Mr. Lock, returning presently, made the mournful statement that closest search of the forecastle had proved unavailing, and at these tidings, the owner openly indulged in a prolonged moan of lament.

"Send up rockets! Do anything—everything!" he instructed the skipper. "There's another boat, ain't there? Why the dickens ain't that launched, too? Me and Lock and Stanley can go and look for 'im in that. Come on, man! Where's Stanley? Where the devil is Stanley? *Stanley!*"

"Mr. Stanley ain't come out on deck, yet, sir," said Mr. Lock. "At least I ain't seen him nowhere. I suppose he hasn't woke up yet."

"Not woke up? With a chap overboard and—— You go fetch him out! Fetch him out by the scruff of his neck, if need be! Here, *I'll go!*"

The short figure of the owner dashed towards Stanley's cabin. Thundering on the panels with his fists, he roared incoherently.

No answering call came from within. Mr. Pidgett put his shoulder against the door and turned the handle, and simultaneously thrust with all his might.

Straightway he entered the cabin acrobatically, for the door had not been locked.

Mr. Pidgett passionately picked himself up, shouting hostile things. The apartment was in darkness and he stumbled to the switch and turned on the light.

"Now then, you skulking little——" he began, and stopped short.

The cabin was empty.

As once an enraged Berserker may have fought an elusive foe, so now did Mr. Pidgett's fiery gaze dart this way and that. The bed lay neat and smooth, the furnishings of it quite undisturbed. No trembling Stanley hid cowering behind the door.

Mr. Pidgett flung open the wardrobe, but his son was not concealed therein. Mr. Pidgett stooped and peered beneath the bed, but no splendid youth had availed himself of that refuge.

Mr. Pidgett turned to leave. A note, tucked into the edge of the mirror, caught his gaze.

He pounced on it and snatched it open.

"Father," ran the missive, *"I absolutely cannot stand your treatment of me any longer. You have positively driven me to it. When you get this, it will be too late. Good-bye."*

"Stanley."

The paper fell from Mr. Pidgett's trembling fingers, and he looked up, blinking. For a time he stared blankly at his reflection in the mirror, and then bent and picked up the note and began to read it again. The flannel petticoat slipped from his shoulders to the floor, and with it there went every vestige of comedy from him. He was just a stricken old man, grey and haggard, and very frightened.

"My boy!" he whispered. "Oh, my boy! Stanley? Oh, my boy, my boy!"

He turned and stumbled back to Captain Dutt.

"It was my son that Clark saw," he told him. "My Stanley! He—he's made away with himself! It was *him!*"

"But the other chap, sir—Smith—he's missing!"

"My Stanley," murmured the owner unheeding. "My boy! Here's the letter. Look!"

Meanwhile, down in the hold, Wayfield, hearkening to the movement on the deck above, had gradually become aware of a nearer, gentler noise. For a long time he kept motionless, listening, perplexed by this rhythmic sound in the darkness.

At last he crept forward quietly.

"Who's there?" he asked.

No answer came, but still the soft sound persisted.

"Who's there?" asked Wayfield again, a little louder.

He waited a moment and then cautiously struck a match.

The light spluttered up to show him Mr. Stanley Pidgett fast asleep on a heap of empty sacks in a corner.

CHAPTER XXI

STANLEY stirred uneasily in his slumber as the light fell across him. A moment after, he opened his eyes and saw Wayfield, and he shrank back in sleepy consternation.

"I—I'm not going to——" he began, when the match suddenly went out. "I won't——" he said fretfully, and then was silent.

There followed a long wait in the darkness, and at last Wayfield struck another match.

"It is you," muttered Stanley. "I thought perhaps I'd been dreaming and——"

"I've got a bit of candle here," remarked Wayfield. "We might just as well settle to a conference now and get it over. I hate talking in the dark; you never know whether the other chap is making faces at you or not."

He fumbled in his pocket and found the candle, and soon the two young men were staring at each other in its pinkish illumination.

"And now," said Wayfield, settling himself cross-legged on the floor opposite to Stanley, "what are you doing here?"

"Well, what are *you* doing here?" hedged Stanley.

"Look here, we'll play this game cards upwards on the table. Had you any idea I might be here?"

"No, I hadn't. If I'd known you were here, I shouldn't have come here myself."

"Really? But why seek solitude in this dismal hole

when you have a luxurious private cabin of your own to retreat to? You haven't turned anchorite, have you? You don't mean to say you've taken to the secret wearing of a hair shirt, and that sort of thing?"

"Do you mean those Jaegar affairs? I don't quite understand you," complained Stanley.

"And I don't understand you at all. Why have you left your snowy cot to sleep fitfully upon a pile of prosaic and somewhat soiled sacks?"

"Look here, I'm not all fool *all* the time," said Stanley. "I see what your game is. You're trying to tie me up and confuse me with a lot of words, so that I won't have time to start wondering what you're doing here till you've decided just how far it will be safe for you to answer me."

"Quite right," cheerfully admitted Wayfield. "I want to know what you are doing here before I give myself away. What *are* you doing?"

"Well, I've, as it were, run away."

"Well, I'm hanged!" exclaimed Wayfield. "So have I."

"If you want to know, I'm utterly fed up with the pater's temper. Positively! Oh, absolutely!"

Wayfield, leaning forward, extended his hand, and Stanley, glad to find any sort of sympathy, took it. Ceremoniously the pair shook hands.

"He's been treating me perfectly awfully these last few days," asserted Stanley.

"Same here," said Wayfield.

"And I'm trying to teach him a lesson."

"I'm engaged on a similar educational scheme," said Wayfield. "These confessions are clearing the air wonderfully. It is already established that we are comrades in distress—that we are withdrawing ourselves from

Mr. Pidgett's rather annoying activities, and that we desire to instruct him by practical experience. Literally and metaphorically, we are both in the same boat."

"I say, you do keep on jockeying!" remarked Stanley.

"I have to. You see, I don't quite know how I stand with you. I have a pretty shrewd idea that you've at least one mighty big grudge up against me. But really your father is as much to blame there as I am. He ought to have had you taught boxing."

"Oh, that's what you're getting at! But, absolutely, I'd almost forgotten it. I've had a lot more to think about since that. I own I felt pretty savage towards you for a day or two—oh, positively murderous! But the pater—well *you* know how he drives pretty well everything else out of your head when *he* starts going."

"*And* while he keeps it up! Then I can take it that, at the moment, you don't feel completely viperish towards me?"

"No, I don't. I've been doing a lot of thinking lately. You know, not just sort of sitting with your eyes shut, but absolutely thinking. Jolly hard work it is too! I've begun to understand what it means to be up against the pater. Look here," said Stanley, with a rare burst of feeling, "sometimes when I've heard the pater going on at you lately I've felt jolly sorry for you. I have!"

"*'A fellow feeling,'*" commented Wayfield. "Likewise, *'one touch of nature.'* Very good of you."

"And then, of course, there's Nora," mentioned Stanley awkwardly.

"Yes, there is," agreed Wayfield, sitting erect.

"Well, you know, she's a fearful nice girl, and all

that sort of thing. I like her awfully. But she doesn't cotton to me a bit, you know. Well, I mean, if she doesn't *want* me—I mean, she's not the only girl in the world, is she? Well dash it! a fellow with my advantages and prospects——”

“Exactly! There's thousands of girls would jump at the chance of being your wife.”

“That's what *I* think,” said Stanley gravely. “But the mater and pater don't seem to see it. They keep on insisting on me tagging after Nora. Well, I mean, what's the *good*? She's not a bit likely to change her mind. And if she did, I'd never feel really flattered to think of all the trouble I had getting her to change it. I'd have let her go her own way, long ago, if my people hadn't kept bothering me so. But I've finished now. She's not keen on me, and I'm dashed if I'm going to hang about on a hopeless job any longer.”

“Very wise of you. Also, speaking as an interested party, may I say I'm very much obliged to you?”

“Besides,” added Stanley plaintively. “I don't want to get married. Plenty of time for that, later on. I—I don't see why I *should* be bully-ragged and chased into it, just to please other people. That's one of the reasons why I've hidden myself down here, just to give the pater a shake-up, and let him see that he's driven me too far. Oh, absolutely over the limit! And the way he's been treating me is——”

“‘Sh!’” warned Wayfield, and extinguished the candle, as the end hatch was gently lifted and a figure began to descend the iron ladder.

“You there?” whispered the voice of Mr. Dobb. “Oh, there's a fine old schemozzle going on! Firework displays, and goodness knows what! Me and Joe 'ave just got back from a little circ'lar tour in the boat, searching

for your 'orrid remains! All we've found is the life-belt old Sam chucked over. Oh, a very sad bit of hevidence! And Peter Lock and old Pidgett is still out in the other boat, 'eading for Australyer to search for you, by the look of 'em! You're safe enough 'ere, but I thought I'd just look down and tell you 'ow things was going."

"Thanks," said Wayfield. "It's nice to think one is missed when one has gone."

"The pup ain't missed you, anyway," returned Mr. Dobb. "'E ain't even come out of 'is cabin, as far as I can see. I would have thought young Stanley would 'ave 'ad a bit of 'eart, even if 'e 'asn't a bit of sense, wouldn't you?"

"Heah, I say, look heah——" exclaimed Stanley.

"Lor!" ejaculated Mr. Dobb, and hastily scratched a match into the light. "Mr. Stanley? *You* here?"

"We're the babes in the wood," said Wayfield. "By a strange coincidence both he and I have chosen this place and this evening to evade Mr. Pidgett's eloquence. I must admit he was here before I arrived, though. In a way, I'm his guest."

"Phew, this is a bit thick!" stated the cook. "*Two* suicides in one night! They'll take a bit of explaining away!"

"I left a sort of note," said Stanley. "I didn't exactly say I'd committed suicide. I left that to be, as it were, inferred, don't you know?"

"But—but 'ow are you going to come to life again?" asked Horace. "You can't afford to stop here, sir, not with a rich father like you've got."

"Oh, naturally! Well, my idea is to stay here till we go into harbour, and then I'll slip ashore, and put

in town for a week or two, and then I'll spring myself on the old boy."

"Ah, and 'e won't 'alf say things to you neither!" sapiently foretold Horace. "Why, when 'e finds out the trick you've played on 'im, 'e'll be worse to you than ever!"

"You—you don't really think so? I—I never thought——"

"You've made a bungle of it, sir," said Horace. "You ought to 'ave bided your time and left 'im when you was ashore. You could 'ave marched off independent after a quarrel with 'im then, and before long 'e'd 'ave been advertising. 'Come back, all is forgiven' in the papers. As it is, 'e thinks you're drowned, and when you pops up again one day 'e'll think you've made a proper fool of 'im, and then——"

"Well, perhaps I ought to have tried to stick it a bit longer. I can see your way is best now."

"Oh, 'course it is! Besides which, you're butting in this chap's chance, and like as not you'll spoil it altogether for 'im. Best thing you can do, sir, is to slip back to your cabin and tear up the note, and pretend you never woke up."

"By gad, I think that's what I'd better do!"

"Yes, and you must promise not to say anything about what this chap's up to, and 'e'll promise not to give it away what you intend to do first chance you get."

"Oh, I'll agree to that willingly!" returned Stanley. "I mean, the pater being such a jolly old brute all round, the more there are trying to tame him the better it'll be in the end, won't it? Oh, I won't say a word! And I'll get back to my cabin now at once. And thanks for your advice."

"Don't mention it, sir," said Horace, and in the darkness his hand sought and found Wayfield's and pressed it in token of relief. "Better let me go up first, sir, and see if the coast is clear," he added, and remounted to the deck.

"Well, I fancy we both understand each other a bit better now," observed Wayfield. "And I wish you luck!"

"Thanks awfully, and all that sort of thing. And the same to you, and—and *that* sort of thing."

Stanley groped his way forward to the foot of the iron ladder and stood there waiting.

"'Ere, it's no good!" Horace's voice suddenly proclaimed in a whisper. "The owner's got that letter! The skipper's just told me. The owner's 'alf mad with worry. 'E's gone off with Peter Lock, and 'e's left word for me and Joe that there's a 'undred pounds reward if your life's saved!"

Horace clambered back to them and stood breathing excitedly in the dark, making little, wheezy, disjointed mutterings and indubitably gesturing freely to encourage his thoughts.

"Oh, it's fell out the simplest thing that ever was!" he declared at last with enthusiasm. "And you'll bear me out that it's nothing to do with the signdikit, won't you? It's me what's going to earn that 'undred pounds, and me alone, for my own self! Don't you see how easy it makes everything? A 'undred pounds for me, a chance for Mr. Stanley to prove to 'is pa that 'e ain't going to put up with 'arsh treatment any longer, and a chance for *you* to win the old chap's gratitude and make 'im only too pleased to fall in with everything you want."

"It sounds fairly comprehensive," said Wayfield, with eager interest. "What do you propose?"

"You follow me and leave everything for me to see to. Mrs. Pidgett's 'aving 'isterics in the saloon, with Miss Barton and Mrs. Brockway looking after 'er, and Joe Tridge and Sam Clark is furling sails up for'ard, and the skipper is 'elping 'em. You follow me. You won't be seen, and I'll soon put things right for you."

He shepherded them to the deck and directed them to lower themselves to the boat, which still awaited beneath the ladder. This move accomplished unobserved, the cook entered the boat too and softly rowed away.

"Now then, over you both go," he ordered, when they were out of the zone of the light cast by the "Jane Gladys." "It's no good jibbing, it's got to be done. You can't get 'alf drowned without getting a bit damp, you know."

"Oh, so that's the idea!" said Wayfield. "I don't know that I altogether care about it. I don't mean the cold water, but the scheme itself. Hardly the straight game, is it?"

"It's 'ardly the straight game you're playing down in the 'old," retorted Horace. "It's a bit late now to be particular. You're 'elping yourself, and you're 'elping me, and you're 'elping Mr. Stanley, so you can't very well back out of it. Think of the scrape 'e's in if you don't 'elp 'im."

"Yes, come on," begged Stanley, and began to lower himself carefully over the boat's side. "Brrh, it's cold!"

"That sounds encouraging," said Wayfield. "However, let's hope we'll all feel happier when it's over. Here goes!"

He dived neatly from the stern, and came up gasping.

"Not so much noise," requested Horace. "You're exhausted and hunconscious, both you and Mr. Stanley. 'Ere, 'ave you wetted the top of your 'ead, Mr. Stanley? You've got to be thorough on this job, you know, sir. Well, now, you 'ang on to this lifebelt with one 'and, Smith, and 'ang on to Mr. Stanley with the other. That's right. And when we get back to the ship you must both shut your eyes and faint, and leave me to tell the story my own way. Now, off we go back."

He rowed till the "Jane Gladys" was within a score of yards, towing the lifebelt and it's load with a short length of cord.

"Saved! Saved!" bawled Horace assertively.

Captain Dutt, shouting excitedly, came rushing to the side of the "Jane Gladys" to look over.

"I thought I see something," called up Horace, "so I nipped back into the boat and went to look. And there they both was, 'anging on the lifebelt, quite unconscious and pretty nigh dead-beat."

The skipper, performing prodigies of daring activity, came down the ladder and helped to draw the immersed pair from the water. Assisted by Mr. Tridge, the skipper and Mr. Dobb succeeded in pushing and hoisting the dead-weights of Stanley and Wayfield to the deck above.

Within three minutes both of them were in their respective beds, snug under great heaps of blankets, and imbibing heartening draughts, while Captain Dutt was joyfully signalling to the second boat to return.

It was Mr. Dobb who met the owner, as soon as ever that worthy set foot again on the deck.

"Mr. Stanley's safe and well, sir," he informed him. "I see something and it turned out to be the lifebelt

old Sam chucked overboard, and there was Mr. Stanley and Smith 'anging on to it. Both dead-beat, they was. Smith managed to tell me 'e saw Mr. Stanley go overboard, and 'e dived in after 'im, and got to 'im but the cold paralysed 'em both, and they'd 'ave gone down for sure if they 'adn't come across the lifebelt floating by at the very moment."

Mr. Clark, hearkening close by, thrust his way forward.

"Well, then, it was *me* what saved Mr. Stanley," he cried. "*I* chucked that lifebelt, didn't I? Very well, then, if there's a reward going—as I believe there is, Mr. Pidgett, sir, with all due respect—it's me that ought to 'ave it."

"Ah, but your lifebelt was no good!" argued Mr. Dobb promptly. "They was already starting to slip from it when I got to 'em. If it 'adn't been for me getting to 'em just when I did they'd both 'ave been drowned by now."

"That be blowed!" indignantly countered Mr. Clark. "It was *my* lifebelt that kept 'em up till you came, wasn't it? If there 'adn't been a lifebelt you'd 'ave 'ad your journey for nothing!"

"Well, and what good would your lifebelt 'ave been if Smith 'adn't 'eld Mr. Stanley up till they managed to get 'old of it?"

"Well, it seems to me," ventured the skipper, "that Smith was the man 'oo really saved Mr. Stanley. But——"

"It was my lifebelt," obstinately claimed Mr. Clark.

"It was me getting to 'em in the boat," contended Horace. "S'pose I 'adn't seen 'em at all—where would they be now?"

"Fair's fair, and you ain't going to do me out of my rights," exclaimed Mr. Clark. "Why, you'd never

'ave seen 'em if it 'adn't been for my lifebelt, so now then!"

"Besides which," stridently put in Mr. Tridge, "it was *me* what pointed 'em out to you, cookie! Surely you ain't going to deny that? I reckon I deserve a share——"

"Well——" breathed Horace, aghast at such rapacity.

Mr. Pidgett, who had been listening bewilderedly to this battle of claims, suddenly managed to grasp the slack of his overstrained emotions and bring them tauter.

"We'll settle the question in the morning," he said. "I want to see my son now. Where is he, poor lad? And then I'll come down and see his—his rescuer and apol—— I'll come down and see him."

This promise he carried out a few minutes later. Mr. Dobb had installed himself as nurse to Wayfield, and was following everything with sharp eyes and a tongue suavely ready with explanations.

"Yes, sir, 'e's awake, sir," he said at the owner's rather bashful advent into the forecastle. "Only I wouldn't talk to 'im too much, sir. 'E's very hexhausted."

"I want to thank him," replied the owner, and held out the palm of friendship towards Wayfield. "He's done me a very, very great service. I've just been to see my poor boy, but he's too weak to talk. He just laid there with his eyes shut all the time. I've given Dutt orders to stand into the nearest port at once for a doctor. And as for you, Wayfield, is there anything I can do to show my gratitude? Any mortal thing? Ask, man, don't be afraid!"

"I asked you something once before," Wayfield reminded him.

"Yes, you did! And I—but everything is different now. You shall marry my niece, and as soon as ever you like. There! And I'm sorry for the way I've treated you, and—well, Stanley—he's my only child and——"

His voice broke and he passed his hand across his eyes.

"No, I'm dashed if I do!" cried Wayfield, struggling up in bed. "I'm hanged if I want to win Nora that way."

"I think Mr. Pidgett, sir," exclaimed Horace in alarm, "you've stayed 'ere long enough. The patient's getting delirious!"

"Look here, I've gained your permission under false pretences, sir. It was all a put-up job! Neither your son nor I was ever in the least danger of getting drowned to-night. We fixed it all up to hoodwink you and——"

"'E's raving!" wailed Horace. "Raving! I thought I could see it coming on!"

"I may be all that you've called me these past few days," said Wayfield. "But I'm not going to win Nora by a trick. I'm going to play the straight game for her, and I warn you that I'll stay in the field till I do win, clean and square. I don't suppose you'll love me any the more for confessing that this rescue business was a fake. However, now you know, so you can restart your tyranny all over again, if you like. I don't mind. I shall stick it. It's worth it. I shall win in the end. I mean to, and I shall! But it'll be a fair win. I promise!"

Mr. Pidgett, without another word, swung round and left the forecastle. The voice of Horace rose up in shrill lament and bitter rebuke.

CHAPTER XXII

“**H**I, you’re wanted in the saloon!” said Mr. Tridge, rousing Wayfield next morning. “The owner wants to speak to you. Not ’alf, ’e don’t, I bet. There’s one of them steely, steady, thoughtful looks in ’is eye. If you was a boy, I’d recommend you to look round for something to pad yourself with before you got too close to ’im.”

Wayfield, dressing quickly, went up on deck to find the “Jane Gladys” berthed against the tiny stone jetty of some river-side fishing village. Passing on, he rapped at the door of the saloon and, in response to a gruff voice, stepped into the presence of the owner.

Mr. Pidgett was seated at the table with an array of letters and documents before him. At the entry of Wayfield he put down his pen, folded his arms, and accorded the young man a prolonged stare from beneath his bushy eyebrows.

“You will leave this boat at midday,” he announced at last. “The railway station is about a mile outside the village, they tell me, and you can get a train there to London at about one o’clock.”

“Very well,” said Wayfield.

“You don’t seem greatly upset?”

“I’m not. I expected worse. In fact, I had an idea you might have thought of something new and complicated in connexion with me and scrubbing brushes and stove pipes. I’m quite relieved sir, I assure you.”

“I should have thought that dismissing you like this

would have had the opposite effect. It settles your hash pretty completely, don't it?"

"Oh, dear me, no!" replied Smith. "After all, it is your turn to score a point, isn't it? Then comes *my* turn again."

"Pooh! what more can you do?"

"I don't think I'll answer that question, sir. In the first place, I'd be telling you what to expect. In the second place, I don't know what more I can do, at the moment. But I'll find something else to try, that you can depend on, sir. Sorry to be a nuisance to you, but, you see, the stake is so tremendously important to me. I intend to keep on and on till I do win!"

"So you had the confounded impudence to tell me last night. And that reminds me, who thought out that precious scheme—you, or Stanley, or that cook chap?"

"I take full responsibility for it, sir."

"Oh, *you* do? Yes, I might have thought that you'd be the one to—— Wait a bit. I didn't ask you who took the responsibility. I asked you who thought it out? Come now, the truth!"

"I've told you I take full responsibility, sir," replied Wayfield, a little stiffly. "It wasn't a very decent scheme, I'll admit, and perhaps, if we'd thought more, none of us would have tried to carry it out. But no harm has come of it. And, after all, I was the one that gave it away in the end, so I'm the one that ought to suffer by it."

"Was it Stanley's idea?" suggested Mr. Pidgett.

"No, it wasn't! Poor little devil, he was far too hazed and worried to plan out anything like that. He saw he'd made a mistake in pretending to—well, he saw he'd made a mistake, and he jumped at the chance of getting back without being bullied out of his life

over it. That's all he had to do with the scheme, and I'm going to risk saying this, sir—it was you who drove him to it. He's only a boy—quite a boy—and——”

“Never mind about that,” growled the owner. “We're not talking about me and my bringing up of Stanley. I want to know who was responsible for the trick you tried to play on me. If it wasn't Stanley, was it Dobb?”

“I've told you I take full responsibility. I don't see why you should think I'm likely to turn informer against anybody. When I join in anything, and the band starts to play over it, I'm always ready to face the music.”

“It *was* that blessed cook.”

“Really, sir, you mustn't jump to conclusions. You did so once before, I believe, with regard to the—the Marquis of Brighton, wasn't it? If the excellent Mr. Dobb participated in our ill-advised little scheme, may I ask you to think that he did so only after I had succeeded in persuading him that he was helping your son out of an awkward corner?”

“You can ask me to think so, but I won't—not for a moment! You're shielding him and——”

“And I leave the ‘Jane Gladys’ at midday. Isn't that enough? I seem to be the cause of all the trouble. Surely if you remove me, there's no need for others to suffer too?”

“Quite the hero!” sneered Mr. Pidgett.

“I'd like to think so, sir. The stern relations always say ‘Bless you, my children’ to the heroine and the hero at the end of the play.”

“The play's already over, so far as you're concerned.”

“No, sir, only the end of the first act.”

"I tell you the play is over."

Wayfield shrugged his shoulders and stood silent. The owner, leaning back in his chair, again surveyed him steadily.

"You leave this boat at midday," said Mr. Pidgett. "You cease to be a member of the crew. Don't you ever let me see you going down the fo'c'sle again after this morning. You will catch that train to London without fail. Next week, when you come back on board the 'Jane Gladys'——"

"What, sir?" cried Wayfield.

"When you come back on board the 'Jane Gladys'," repeated the owner, "you come back as my guest."

"But—but——"

"I ain't going to say a lot," interrupted the owner. "You've heard about folks having bitter pills to swallow? Well, I'm *chewing* a bitter pill. But I ain't going to stand in the way of you and Nora any longer. It ain't what I'd 'oped and it ain't what I intended, but maybe it'll all turn out for the best, after all."

"I—I don't quite know what to say, sir, or how to thank you. Nora——"

"I've done a bit of thinking these last twelve hours, and seen things from different points than my own. I tell you this now, but I ain't at all the sort ever to talk about it again—understand? You've stood up to me fair and square, and wasn't going to win by a trick, was you? Well, that's the sort of chap I can't help admiring, though I 'ate him all the time. And then again there was the way you warned me you was going to stay in the game till the end. I *liked* that. That was grit. That was pluck. And—well, if you and Nora are so set on each other——"

"Oh, we are, we are!"

"I'd more than half made up my mind when I sent for you this morning. But I just wanted to *see*. So you wouldn't give Stanley or the cook away, eh? My lad, if you *had*—— But I guess I just *knew* you wouldn't."

The owner rose, on an impulse, and came round the table with outstretched hand.

"I fancy you'll do," he asserted. "A chap like you ought to make my niece a pretty fair kind of husband. Oh, I dare say I'll get over my disappointment soon enough. Maybe you're the kind of a chap I've been hoping Stan would turn out, only he's still quite a kid, as you say. I've been expecting too much from him, and that's proved a disappointment for both of us. But I'll try an easier track with him for a bit, and see how that goes. Dammit!" he went off suddenly, "ever read a book called the 'Christmas Carol'? Remember old who-was-it? Scroogius?"

"Scrooge."

"That's the chap! Blessed if I don't feel just like him this morning. Sort of lighter and ready to do anything for anybody. He went through a pretty bad night or two, you remember. Well, last night, *I*—oh, well, we was all to blame, and we needn't say any more about it. So you'll just catch that train, and come back next week. It'll make a break of it, and you can start on a fresh footing with the crew, and—and now, if you wait here a moment, I'll send Nora in to you."

He gripped Wayfield's hand again, shook it, and went to the door. Then he came back, smiling and gesticulating at the spread of papers on the table.

"I got a bit of influence," he said. "You'll have to get another pint of red ink and a second ruler before

long. I'll see you're kept busy. You'll belong to the family by then. No reason why you shouldn't become my right-hand man and—but you don't want to talk business now. You want to see Nora."

He bustled out, and a few moments after the girl came into the saloon, standing just inside the doorway, a little shyly, but with a wonderful light in her eyes.

Wayfield leaped forward—and closed the door behind her. . . .

Mr. Samuel Clark, who had been lurking amidships with a mop, shook his head in annoyance at this evidence of Wayfield's presence of mind. Immediately suspending his labours, he repaired to the galley.

"'E's got 'er!" he announced tersely.

"No!" ejaculated Horace. "How do you know?"

"I see 'is face when 'e shut the door," returned Mr. Clark. "And, before that, I see the owner shake 'ands with 'im, and then come out and send Miss Barton to 'im."

"That ought to be worth a bit to 'Orace & Co.," declared the cook elatedly. "'E's bound to tip 'is old shipmates something pretty substantial after that. Besides, I reckon 'e as good as owes me a 'undred pounds. If 'e 'adn't spoke up so foolish last night I'd 'ave a 'undred pounds in my pocket by now for saving Stanley's life."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't!" denied Mr. Clark quickly. "It was my lifebelt what done the trick, wasn't it? Very well, then, I'm entitled to 'alf that 'undred pounds at least; and if you think you're going to keep it in your pocket, you're mistook. You 'and it over!"

"Why, I ain't got it, you old stoopid. No one ain't got it, nor likely to get it now. Smith, or whatever 'e

calls 'imself, properly give the game away. Robbery—that's what I calls it. 'E 'ad no right to do me out of a 'undred quid what I'd earned by my own efforts."

"It was *me*——" began Mr. Clark, with heat, when the cook interrupted him.

"What's the good of talking about it?" asked Horace. "It's gone, and there's a end of it. Our only 'ope is that Smith makes it up to us a bit. I did my best to let 'im see that that way 'is dooty lay last night. I didn't 'alf give 'im a talking to when the owner 'ad gone. In the end, 'e told me to shut up, unless I wanted a black eye."

"Then what 'appened?"

"Well, I ain't got a black eye this morning, 'ave I?" returned Horace. "Still, I must say that, up to now, it ain't turned out quite so bad as I been expecting. I been trembling in me shoes all the morning, waiting for the owner to send for *me*. But 'e's left it a bit long now, so 'e can't be going to take it so very serious. And if 'e's consented to 'is niece marrying Smith, 'e can't be in such a bad temper by now."

"Mind you, I ain't a bit surprised at the hengagement," said Mr. Clark. "I been hexpecting some sort of noos of that kind ever since last Sunday week. Me right ear was tickling all day that day, and that's always a sign of a wedding."

"So I've 'eard," agreed Horace. "But 'ow did you know this was the wedding it meant? Why, it might 'ave foretold a wedding between you and Mrs. Brockway, for that matter."

"Don't talk so ridic'lous," impatiently begged Mr. Clark. "Why, me and 'er don't scarcely speak to each other now. Ever since 'er second cousin come along at Plynhampton and showed me 'ow to get peace with

honour, 'er and me are strangers, as it might be. Why, when I passed 'er the other day, I 'eld my nose so 'igh and mighty in the air that I fell over a mat! A wedding between me and 'er, indeed! Don't you talk about unpleasant things, 'Orace, *if* you please. Or, if you must, let's talk about that 'undred quid you tried to diddle me out of."

"I never tried to diddle nobody out of it, except, maybe, the owner. Why, if I'd got that 'undred quid, I was going to put it straight into the funds of the sign-dikit."

"The signdikit!" scoffed Mr. Clark. "A jolly fine signdikit it is too! 'Ere 'ave we been 'anging on for weeks, waiting for a chance, and you going about looking like—like Lord Rothschild and Wellington and the Chancellor of the Hexchequer all rolled into one, and what's the blessed signdikit done all this time? Nothing! I'm beginning to be sorry I ever let you beg and persuade me to leave my comfortable little ferrying job ashore."

"The signdikit ain't done so bad," stated Horace. "Apart from the money me and Joe and Peter Lock are ready to put into it at the right time, we've made thirty quid, ain't we?"

"We've made thirty quid, one way and another, out of Smith, but that ain't what we set out to do, was it? We was going to try and see if we couldn't some'ow manage to get 'old of the 'Jane Gladys' for our own property, wasn't we? And where are we now? Why, as far off from it as ever. And, besides, there ain't much more to be 'oped for from Smith now, is there? A feller after a girl is a dashed sight freer with 'is money than the chap 'oo's got 'is gal safe and sound, and that's 'uman philosophy, ain't it? Love is blind,

right enough, but the expenses of setting up a 'ome nowadays comes as a eye-opener and no mistake."

"You may be right, Sam, but you're a miserable old man, all the same," returned Horace. "We've still got to get a joy-offering from Smith, don't forget. That'll be the end of 'im, as far as we're concerned, and then the signdikit can get to work on its original programme. Don't you worry, Sam; I'm the 'ead of this signdikit, and I ain't asleep."

"I know you ain't," replied Mr. Clark restively. "What worries me is that you be'aves as if you was."

Mr. Dobb was still groping for a satisfactory retort when the galley door opened and Mr. Joseph Tridge entered.

"'Eard the noos?" he asked. "Smith's down below in the fo'c'sle packing up 'is things. 'E's leaving the boat to-day and going back to London, 'e tells me. And the owner 'as consented to 'im marrying Miss Barton, and 'e's coming back again next week as a guest on board."

"Packing up, is 'e?" quickly asked Horace. "In that case I think I'd better go below and 'ave a word with 'im. 'E's bound to be in a good temper. I'll just go and congratulate 'im on be'alf of the crew."

"I'm coming with you," said Mr. Clark firmly. "I'm a member of the crew; and a member of the signdikit, too," he added pointedly, "and I ain't taking no more risks. I can't hafford to lose a 'undred pounds every day."

"'E won't be going for a 'alf hour or so," observed Mr. Tridge. "And I've got some more bits of noos yet. The owner and 'is missis and the skipper 'ave been talking things over pretty free on deck. A rare good temper the owner is in this morning. Patted young

Stanley on the back twice, 'e did, and asked 'im 'ow 'e was off for money, just like a blessed old Father Christmas! And the skipper's got a uncle or something living in these parts, and the owner 'as give 'im a couple of days off to go and see 'im. We're stopping in 'arbour 'ere for the next three or four days. And Mister Stanley 'as 'ired a motor-car and gone off to one of them fashionable seaside towns, somewhere by, till to-night."

"Better than a noospaper, you are, Joe," declared Mr. Dobb. "I've dropped many a worse newspaper than you in the gutter, after reading the result of the three o'clock race.' "

"Mrs. Pidgett ain't a bit upset over the engagement," continued Mr. Tridge. "She says she see that Stanley ain't really the marrying sort—not yet—and that she took a fancy to Miss Barton's young man right from the first. She says she only 'opes they'll 'urry along the wedding, so as to give 'er a chance to get back 'ome and make the preparations. Tired of going about the sea, doing nothing, she said she was."

"She said that?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"She did. Said so, straight out, to the owner. Said that she'd never really cared for the sea, not even when she was a little gal, and that now she'd 'ad so much of it that she wouldn't mind if she never saw it again so long as she lived. And she and Miss Barton are going by the evening train to London, to look at fashion-plates, far as I could understand, and they're not coming back again till next week."

Mr. Dobb authoritatively raised his hand for silence. Lighting a cigarette, he sat on the corner of the table and puffed in close cogitation.

"Listen, Joe," he ordered presently. 'Ave I got it right? Smith and Mrs. Pidgett and Miss Barton and

the skipper, won't any of 'em be on the boat to-night? And Mr. Stanley won't be back till late, of course? There'll only be us four and the owner and Mrs. Brockway on the boat to-night till Stanley comes back?"

"That's right," corroborated Mr. Tridge. "Why?"

Mr. Dobb nodded portentously at his two shipmates.

"Looks very much to me," he said, "as if our time was come. The signdikit is going to 'ave it's chance at last!"

CHAPTER XXIII

INTO the orderly and placid existence of the "Red Dragon," that ancient hostelry so conveniently adjacent to the little jetty, had permeated a stirring, stimulating influence, and, though the evening was still young, already the low, smoke-blackened ceiling of the taproom was reverberating with joviality.

According to their custom, the sailormen of the "Jane Gladys," berthed hard by, had taken it upon themselves to furnish the company with lively entertainment.

True, the opening of the programme had been none too auspicious. Mr. Peter Lock had started the proceedings with a comic song, droll enough in its way, but phrased in metropolitan idioms which conveyed but little meaning to this gathering of simple villagers. Wherefore, then, had the ditty fallen very flat, and at its close Mr. Lock had sulkily sat down again amidst an awkward silence, and with the audience looking distinctly embarrassed.

This, in itself, was a bad enough beginning, but Mr. Joseph Tridge, in his zeal to uphold the prestige of the confederacy, had contrived to give an even worse turn to the situation, for he had irately started up and roundly offered to fight anyone who thought Mr. Lock's song was not funny.

This challenge had imposed a discomfortable strain upon the amity of the meeting, and two of the inhabitants were already starting to edge inconspicuously towards the door when Mr. Samuel Clark, declining to be robbed of his chance to shine as an artist, loudly

announced that he was going to do a dance, and stood up forthwith and did it.

Thenceforward the programme went with a swing. To mollify Mr. Tridge the spectators rewarded Mr. Clark's agility with liberal plaudits. Mr. Clark, in return for these tributes, capered and pranced and cavorted till he was completely out of breath.

This gave Mr. Lock opportunity to sing again, and this time he chose a sentimental ballad as more likely to meet with local comprehension, though the company, still keeping a wary eye on Mr. Tridge, persisted in laughing immoderately at every line.

And, next, Mr. Clark and Mr. Tridge danced a grave *pas de deux*, with Mr. Clark affecting to be a lady and voicing comments on the gentlemen present in a high, mincing falsetto. After that Mr. Lock had supplied a song, unmistakably comic, about homely things familiar to all, and had gone on to extemporize a most diverting ventriloquial entertainment.

And so time was passing most enjoyably, with Mr. Lock and Mr. Tridge and Mr. Clark making unstinted endeavor to enliven the company. But Mr. Horace Dobb, the fourth member of the quartet of strangers, sat aloof, broodily, taking no heed of the prevalent good humour.

From time to time one or other of his shipmates would approach him and ask him if he had thought of anything yet, but always Mr. Dobb shook his head with a certain impatience and glared with more and more hostility at the big clock on the wall.

It was in the little wait which ensued while the three talented performers made pretence that they were quite unaware that liquid refreshment had been ordered for them that a gnarled and bewhiskered aborigine entered the room.

"Tidy thick mist a-settling down," he observed. "You won't be able to see your hand before your nose in a couple of hours' time, look you. As thick as ever I've knawed it this ten year. Just such a night as that when the 'Carnarvon Maid' was burnt, when she lay off the Head yonder. Just such a night, inteet, yess."

As though this speech paid his levy for entrance to the company, he took his seat in a corner and gave his undivided attention to his surroundings. Mr. Dobb sat staring at the old man, and gradually the cook's lips began to open wider and wider under the stress of rising excitement.

A minute later Mr. Dobb voiced an ardent expression of satisfaction, and, after a further short space of thought, began to rummage in his pockets. Bringing to light a theoretically unsullied fragment of note-paper and a pencil, he carefully indited a few lines. Then he folded the paper and left the inn with it.

He came back quite soon and beckoned to his shipmates. The resumed concert immediately lapsed, and Mr. Dobb led his shipmates outside to a deserted stretch of the quay.

"Sam, I just give a kid a penny to take a note to Mrs. Brockway from you," he said.

"From *me*?" shrilled Mr. Clark. "Well, there's impudence! There's interferingness for you! Whatever made you do it?"

"Get 'er off the boat," explained Mr. Dobb. "I said, 'Meet me in front of the chapel in ten minutes. All will be forgiven. Yours respectful.—Sam Clark.'"

"All will *not* be forgiven!" denied Mr. Clark emphatically. "And what did you make it a chapel for? That's bound to give 'er a chance to start talking about weddings and things."

"There's no call for you to keep the appointment. You can easy tell 'er later on that it was a practical joke, and point out that the note ain't in your 'and-writing."

"Never mind about smoothing old Sam down," struck in Mr. Tridge. "Tell us what the idea is, 'Orace. What do you want 'er off the boat for?"

"Fire on board the 'Jane Gladys'," returned Mr. Dobb, in the manner of one reading newspaper headlines. "Boat narrowly hescapes being a complete wreck. Saved by the 'eroism of the crew. Gallant rescue of the owner."

"What's all that mean?" asked Mr. Lock.

"What I says. A fire's going to break out on——"

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed Mr. Lock. "And we does the insurance company down for a bit as a reward? Not a bad idea."

"We don't want to 'ave nothing to do with insurance companies," said Mr. Dobb. "They're a nosey, inquisitive, suspicious lot! But suppose the 'Jane Gladys' was to catch fire to-night. Where should we stand then?"

"In the dock, like as not," answered Mr. Lock.

"Not a bit of it," returned Mr. Dobb. "Suppose we was to put the fire out?"

"Where's the sense of lighting a fire and putting it out again?" inquired Mr. Clark, perplexed.

"Suppose a fire broke out and the ship was abandoned? Suppose we saved the owner's life and rowed away with 'im?" propounded Mr. Dobb. "And suppose we made up our minds to go back to the fire and try to put it out? Suppose we did put it out?"

"Well, suppose we suppose all that?" said Mr. Tridge. "What then?"

"Well, it'll be a funny position, won't it?" asked Horace. "Look 'ere, the owner's wife is sick of the boat already, and I shouldn't be surprised if he was beginning to 'ave 'ad enough of it by now. Well, if there's a fire, and we save 'is life, and put the fire out after the boat's been abandoned, that gives us a claim to salvage and 'is gratitude and goodness knows what else. Very well, then, when it's all over, we goes up to 'im and says we'd like to buy the old boat between us, and we offer 'im all the money we've got."

"And promise to owe 'im a bit more into the bargain, if 'e likes," said Mr. Tridge.

"Yes; well, 'e thinks of all the complications about the claim for salvage of a deerlict ship, and putting out the fire, and saving 'is life, and what not and so on. And in the end 'e meets us more than 'alf-way. 'E's bound to. The more you think it over the more you see 'e's bound to do 'is best for us."

"But 'ow are you going to save 'is life? 'Ow are you going to put out the fire? 'Ow are you going to start it? 'Ow are you going to prevent folks on the jetty from——" his shipmates began to assail him in chorus.

"You leave it all to me," requested Mr. Dobb. "It's that old chap talking about a ship on fire on a misty night like this put the idea in my 'ead, and the rest I've worked out for myself. There's only one thing I wants, and then we're free to begin—just one little thing needed, as a present for the owner."

"A present for the owner?" asked Mr. Tridge. "What's that? Chlorryform?"

"No, a lobster!" leered Mr. Dobb, and tapped his forehead. "I've got it there," he boasted. "I never forget things."

In a community where the principal industry is the plucking forth of fish from its native element, the procuring of a lobster was not a matter that presented great difficulty. Indeed, at the second cottage to which they were directed the four sailormen were enabled to secure what they sought.

From first to last the completion of the purchase, with all the imputations and denials and grudging admissions attendant on bargaining, occupied less than five minutes. Yet, in that short space of time, something had happened aboard the "Jane Gladys" which, had he known it, would have given Mr. Horace Dobb cause for more thought.

For Mr. Stanley Pidgett had been importuned by the driver of the hired motor-car to return to the village before the mist enveloping the whole coast became so opaque as to render speedy transit dangerous. Stanley, finding the delights of the seaside town beginning to wane, and still being prone to a weariness as the result of the last few days' nerve strain, had willingly consented to early departure, and had thus made a premature return to the "Jane Gladys."

He found the boat very still and quiet. The saloon door was open, and he caught a glimpse of his father immersed in correspondence. Experience had long taught the youth that there was grave risk in intruding on his sire in such hallowed moments, and therefore he had gone softly straight to his cabin. With intention to join his father at a later and more favourable opportunity, he had flung himself on his bed, and there he was already dozing when Mr. Dobb and his companions bore the lobster in triumph to the galley.

"There's no light in Mrs. Brockway's cabin," ob-

served Mr. Dobb with satisfaction. "It's all right! She's keeping that appointment outside the chapel with you, Sam. I 'ope you're enjoying it."

"More than I should if I was there," ungallantly replied Mr. Clark.

Deftly Mr. Dobb severed the lobster and placed it on a dish with alluring garnishings.

"Don't ever tell me there ain't a providence what 'elp those what 'elps themselves," piously said Horace as he took a new loaf from the bin. "*No-o!*"

He cut the bread in slices, buttering it generously. Then, setting all neatly on a tray, he made his way to the saloon with it.

"Just brought you a snack for your supper, sir."

Mr. Pidgett, engrossed in his letters, nodded.

"I forget whether the missis said it was lobster you ought to 'ave, or ought not to 'ave, sir," said Mr. Dobb. "It's a lovely fresh one, but if you don't care for it you can easy leave it."

"Eh?" exclaimed Mr. Pidgett absently, and glanced up and caught view of the contents of the dish. "What's that? Lobster? Ugh, take it away, man! Poison to me! Take it away!"

Mr. Dobb, in some despair, picked up the tray again. Mr. Pidgett permitted himself another, longer look at the dish.

"All right!" he grunted. "You can leave it!"

Mr. Dobb, repressing an impulse to cheer, withdrew empty handed, and positively danced back to the galley.

"We'll allow 'im a few minutes' grace and then——" he began.

"'Ush!" whispered Mr. Tridge. "'Ear them foot-

steps? That's the old geezer coming back again. There's a impatient old woman for you. Why couldn't she 'ave waited a bit longer?"

"'Ere, Sam, out you go and 'ead 'er off!" ordered Mr. Dobb. "Tell 'er you missed 'er in the fog, and 'ad come back 'ere to look for 'er. Tell 'er anything! Go on! We don't want no one crying and spying aboard 'ere for a bit."

"I ain't going!" asserted Mr. Clark. "No fear!"

"Oh, don't say that, Sam!" appealed Mr. Dobb wildly.

"I do say it! I'm done with 'er for good and all, thanks be! Besides which, you chaps will all go doing things while I'm not there, and do me out of the benefits of being in the signdikit! I know you!"

Vehemently Mr. Dobb babbled forth promises, buttressing and supplementing them with tremendous oaths of fealty to Mr. Clark's interests, and Mr. Lock and Mr. Tridge added their perfervid persuasions.

"Very well, I'll go," said Mr. Clark at last. "Just for this once, mind! This the very last time I'm going to play with fire to 'elp the signdikit! Understand that?"

"If you don't go at once there won't be no signdikit," urged Mr. Dobb.

"Oh, well, if I'm as himportant a member as that," said Mr. Clark, "I reckon I ought to 'ave *two* shares!"

He appeared desirous of debating and settling this point at once, but his distraught companions hustled him through the door and held it shut against him.

"Two shares at least," he said firmly, through the keyhole. "Come to think of it, I don't know as *three* wouldn't be more——" He stopped and his voice took a fuller, suaver tone. "Oh, there you are, Mrs. Brock-

way, ma'am? I been looking all over the place for you."

She answered with some asperity, and Mr. Clark's next speech flowed in even mellower, more soothing accents. His shipmates heard him say something about finding a spot where he could explain without being listened to by a pack of greedy eavesdroppers. Followed, the shuffle of footsteps receding over the gangway, and next, the diminuendo voice of the plump sailorman. Then silence, draped at its end with expressions of the galley's intense relief.

Mr. Pidgett, setting aside an empty tray a little later, looked up to find Mr. Tridge and Mr. Lock in the doorway.

"Begging your pardon, sir," opened Mr. Tridge, "but do I understand as the skipper won't be back this evening? If so, it's a bit unfortunate."

"Why, how's that?" asked the owner sharply.

"Well, sir, they've been explaining things to me ashore," replied Mr. Tridge. "This 'ere 'arbour is very pecooliar, it seems. We appear to 'ave chose a very awkward spot 'ere. Right-down risky our berth is, so they tells me."

"Risky, when we're tied up to the jetty?" demurred the owner. "Pooh, that's absurd on the face of it!"

"Yes, sir, on the face of it, it is," agreed Mr. Tridge. "But you look a bit deeper and you'll see that it ain't. The wind being where it is, and the tide running with a scour——"

"And the cross-current at the 'arbour mouth," added Mr. Lock helpfully.

"Together with a gravel bottom to the river——" went on Mr. Tridge.

"To say nothing of the mist——"

"What the deuce are you driving at?" demanded Mr.

Pidgett. "You know I don't understand all this sea-talk. Tell me what you mean in plain English! What's all this jabber about currents and tides and winds now?"

"Well, sir, it means as a vessel of our size is most likely to get jammed up against the jetty at 'alf-tide, and then be ground mighty nigh to bits as the water goes down. Of course, you not being a sailorman, sir, can't understand that, but——"

"Well, can't you see to it? Must you come and bother *me* about it? Can't you put it right?"

"Of course we can, sir," replied Mr. Lock. "Only we want your permission first. The remedy is easy enough. We've just got to drop down careful on the tide and stand out to sea a mile or so. We can anchor there and ride safe till morning, and then we can come back in 'ere again, if you like. And, after we've shifted out to-night, one of us can row back ashore and wait on the jetty for Mr. Stanley and bring him aboard."

"All right, all right!" concurred Mr. Pidgett, somewhat testily. "Do what you think is best and don't come worrying me when I'm busy. And take this confounded tray away with you, and shut the door behind you."

Returning to their leader, Mr. Lock and Mr. Tridge reported progress. Their success was gleefully acclaimed by Mr. Dobb and, without further delay, the three shipmates gave themselves to the task of conducting the "Jane Gladys" out to sea.

Very quietly and carefully did they proceed in all their operations. Horace and Mr. Tridge, toiling manfully in one of the boats, towed the vessel out into the open water, their labours facilitated by the ebbing tide and a favouring wind.

Mr. Lock kept control of the wheel, and, when a good mile out to sea, the two oarsmen clambered back aboard the vessel. The anchor splashed into the water and the "Jane Gladys" floated motionless on the mist-en-shrouded surface.

"There we are!" exclaimed Horace. "It'll take anybody all their time to see what we're up to now, and start interfering with our programme. I'll just pop along and see 'ow the owner's getting on, while you, Joe, 'unt around and get a couple of them big zinc baths and take 'em down into the 'old. And, Peter, you find up some old damp straw and a few noospapers and a pint or two of paraffin ile."

Knocking at the entrance to the saloon, Mr. Dobb intruded his head and said something about seeing if Mr. Pidgett wanted anything else. The owner, peering at the cook awhile out of lustreless eyes, shook his head and made a weary gesture of dismissal.

"Safe as houses, Joe!" jubilantly announced Mr. Dobb, hurrying back to his shipmates. "Properly doped! Get down the 'old, Peter, and 'elp Joe start them bonfires, like I've explained to you. Be careful not to do any damage. We can fix up all the damages realistic when we comes back again to put the fire out."

Mr. Pidgett, in the saloon, was sitting back in his chair in a lumpish attitude. From time to time a faint moan escaped his lips, and frequently he raised his hand to draw the back of it across his forehead. A cigar, which he had lighted in the hope of allaying certain qualms, rested on a corner of the table, neglected, its smoke ascending in a graceful, wavering spiral.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" suddenly lamented Mr. Pidgett, in more acute malaise, and he began to beat his fists upon his chest with some violence.

The action jarred the table, dislodging the cigar. It dropped into the centre of a mass of crumpled papers in the waste-basket standing below, and a brisk floor-draught at once encouraged its glow.

But Mr. Pidgett was too preoccupied to notice anything of this mishap, and he continued violently to assail his chest until, abruptly, his energy waned and he lay back, heavy and distressed, in his chair.

And this was his state when Mr. Dobb unceremoniously rushed in and, placing a hand at the side of his mouth, began to bawl aloud with extraordinary vigour.

"Fire!" shouted Mr. Dobb. "Fire! The blessed ship's afire, and there ain't a moment to be wasted if you wants to get away alive. FIRE!"

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. PIDGETT, looking up woefully at this dire outcry, sighed and grunted fretfully and fell again to silent introspection.

"*FIRE!*" repeated Mr. Dobb imperatively.

"Gurr!" growled Mr. Pidgett. "Go away!"

"You got to let us get you out of this while we can, sir," said Horace. "A reg'lar roaring furnace and——"

"Oh, do go away!" requested Mr. Pidgett. "Don't come bothering me! Go away! I can't move! Leave me alone!"

"I ain't going to leave you 'ere to be roasted alive," returned Mr. Dobb heroically. "Not while I've a breath left in my body. You trust yourself to me. I'll see to you!"

He caught hold of Mr. Pidgett's arm and dragged him to his feet. The owner, protesting almost tearfully against this action, made feeble, futile efforts to hit the cook with his uncaptured hand. Undaunted, Mr. Dobb half-led, half-dragged Mr. Pidgett to the open door.

"Look at that!" cried Horace, and pointed dramatically.

And, indeed, the scene was worthy of the gesture. From the hold great billowing clouds of smoke were ascending to swerve into and mix with the cleaner white of the mist. The air was fraught with a rank, choking odour. Ever and anon a leap of unseen flame turned

the vapoured air to a golden yellow and testified to Mr. Lock's skill as a creator of striking effects with a can of oil and a newspaper.

"S'fire," said the owner, gazing owlshly on the dread spectacle.

"It is a fire!" returned the cook; "and it'll be all over this blessed ship in a minute. We can't do nothing with it. 'Ere, Peter!" he called, as Mr. Lock came climbing out of the hold. "Can we put it out, do you think?"

Mr. Lock tersely mentioned another fiery region as far more likely to be quelled by their efforts.

"There you are. 'E knows! 'E's been down there!" said Mr. Dobb ambiguously. "Come on, sir, there ain't a moment to be wasted if you're to get away safe."

"I don't know," said the owner; "I don't know that I *want* to get away!"

"Oh, please, sir, that won't do! Of course you must get away. Me and Peter and Sam 'ave launched the boats. We're only waiting for you to give the order to abandon ship. And don't ever forget you give us that order, sir. It's most important. We shall 'ave to keep on reminding of you. Now, sir—'Abandon ship'," he prompted.

"'Bandon ship," echoed Mr. Pidgett mechanically, and at once he was picked up in Mr. Tridge's strong arms and, while still he was making weak complaint against this unfeeling act, he found himself in one of the boats.

"Off you go with 'im, Joe," whispered Mr. Dobb. "Me and Peter'll keep alongside of you in the other boat. Best allow a goodish time before we go back, in case 'e's able to notice a bit more than we think 'e does. 'E'll get worse afore 'e's better, so there's no 'urry.

Besides, if we goes back too soon 'e might come to 'is senses momentary, and then where should we be?"

Side by side the two small boats put out into the mist. Mr. Pidgett, subsiding on to the floor-boards, was solicitously covered with a coat by Mr. Tridge.

"Don't want 'im to catch a chill," muttered Mr. Tridge to himself, in apology for such tenderness. "Don't want 'im to peg out, nor nothing like that—not till 'e's squared up with us, anyway."

For a full half hour the two boats were silent and motionless. Then suddenly Mr. Dobb vented a cry of alarm.

"'Ere, I never noticed which way we was pulling," he exclaimed. "This blessed fog is so thick you can't 'ardly see a yard. Whereabouts is the old boat lying? Don't say we've lost 'er, Peter? Don't say that!"

"No, she's over there," replied Mr. Lock. "I've kept the line all right in my mind. Might as well be getting back to 'er, I should think!"

Even as he spoke, a faint, pinkish tinge suffused the mist in the distance.

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Dobb. "O-oh!" he repeated in still greater concern. "Look! See! Blessed if the old 'Jane Gladys' ain't been and *really* took fire now!"

Guided by the tiny roseate glow, both boats began to race back to the vessel. The distance, however, proved greater than had been imagined, and gradually the glow weakened and then vanished altogether, leaving the two boats groping helplessly in the mist, rowing now this way and now that, in vain effort to discover the vessel.

Wearied and exhausted, they gave up the struggle at last.

"Not a bit of good," puffed Mr. Dobb. "We've been

all over the place, and we don't know which way we're pointing ourselves now."

"We shall have to stick 'ere till daybreak," growled Mr. Tridge from the neighbouring boat. "We don't even know where the coast is now. If we tries to row ashore we might be 'eading straight out to sea, for all we know."

"The old boat's burned 'erself right out and sunk," declared Mr. Dobb. "There's a nasty end for the poor old 'Jane Gladys'!"

"*And* for the signdikit!" sighed Mr. Tridge desolately.

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And now narrative must heel and tack to pick up Mr. Stanley Pidgett, else a notable personality were left behind jettisoned and forgotten, in the final straight run for harbour.

When last that elegant boy came under heed, he had lain himself down on his cabin bed, and there he had very soon yielded to sleep. He was still but a sleek and futile youth when his eyes closed. When he rose again from his rest it was to become a man of action and courage, a flame-lit hero, a veritable epic figure amidst the red ruin which sought the vessel's destruction.

So completely tired was he by the day's pleasure and the week's stress that the turmoil leading to the departure of his father and the crew had not had the power to rouse him to full consciousness. He had stirred and murmured at the shouts and footsteps on the deck, but lately he had come to the habit of awesome, adventurous dreams, and these noises now incorporated themselves therefore into his nightmare.

And so he turned over on his mattress and was soon

fast asleep again, nor did he reawaken till a loud shivering of glass and the sound of some heavy object falling disturbed his repose. For a little while he lay half awake, perplexed and listening. Then, by degrees, he became aware of a peculiar acrid smell.

Grumpily, he anathematized the crew's taste in tobacco and once more settled himself to sleep. But now a phenomenon obstinately obtruded itself on his notice. His cabin should have been in utter darkness, and yet it seemed to flicker with gentle light, rather like the rays of a kinema lantern in its rapid intermittency, but yellow in colour.

In no way did this alarm him, but it annoyed him. He resented it as a deterrent to slumber. It was only when another thud and a queer kind of crackling sound reached his ears that he came to perfect wakefulness.

He leaped from his couch and rushed out on deck.

At once he discovered that the saloon was well and truly in a blaze. It needed no great perspicuity to discover that fact, for already one of the large skylights had fallen in and little blue tongues of flame were relishingly licking the empty framework. Also, a fat column of fire was rising in the centre of the saloon, and making determined effort to find an exit through the painted splendour of the ceiling, while the silken hangings down one side of the apartment were already become no more than charred and smouldering fragments clinging to the metal rails.

Some atavistic quality moved Stanley to phrase his emotions in the style of the Pidgetts who had never known wealth and refinement.

"Coo' lumme!" cried Stanley, staring.

It is to his credit that instinctively he raced along to his father's cabin, but that was empty. He even

remembered to bang and kick at Mrs. Brockway's door, but no answering squeal rewarded him, and he flung open the door and found that she, too, was absent. He turned and rushed down into the forecastle, agitatedly fluting a general alarm, but here, likewise, he found no response.

He ran to the gangway and found that it had been drawn in, and next learned, to his vast surprise, that the vessel was no longer laying against a jetty.

Panic-stricken at his isolation in this moment of danger, he began to trot about, looking for the boats, but they were both gone. A lifebelt came under his wildly-roving gaze, and he snatched it from its hook and ran towards the ladder with it.

And then he stopped and looked back at the burning saloon. A point of flame had pierced its way through the ceiling and was now leaping up, up, a beacon of disaster; the skylight frame was blazing and crackling fiercely.

Stanley's next act stands as inexplicable and difficult to credit. He deliberately squared his chin.

"May as well have a try, anyhow," he said, aloud, and experienced surprise at hearing himself voice such sentiment in so determined a tone.

He became extraordinarily active. There were fire-buckets and chemical extinguishers aboard in great profusion, and these he fetched and threw on the flames with undiminishing energy, if with varying success. And after these aids were exhausted there was all the water in the sea at hand for supply, and a bucket with a length of rope to it for apparatus.

Puffing and panting, running backwards and forwards, leaping and sometimes sprawling over unseen obstacles on the deck, Stanley fought frenziedly for vic-

tory. A whirlwind of activity was he amid the flames and smoke, and all the time he was also, as it were, standing apart and watching and marvelling at a Stanley quite strange and unexpected to him.

And after an age, he was heartened by some symptoms of surrender in the enemy. The flames grew less and less, dwindled in vigour, and died down to evil-smelling smoulderings and charrings. Inspired, he fetched a leathern coat which was his armour and glory when motor-cycling, and with this garment he beat out the last sullen flames and trampled the sparks into darkness beneath his feet. . . .

And thus you may vignette him in final triumph, dishevelled and grimed and blackened, with a badly-burned arm and a cut on his cheek, and his long hair in the most shocking disorder. The erstwhile gorgeous saloon, now a melancholy, reeking wreck, serves as a fitting background to him as, dead-beat, he lapses into the only undamaged chair in the room and looks about him dazedly.

And again heredity asserts itself.

"A proper old how-de-do!" he mutters. "'Strewth, but it was a blinkin' close shave! The guv'nor—the guv'nor and the old lady—they'll—they'll——"

His chin drops forward on his chest and he sleeps. . . .

Singularly cold and cheerless did the three lost mariners find the dawn. A breeze, gathering strength, grew with the daylight and blew away the mist by perceptible degrees.

Presently sight could travel through the bleak light for a hundred yards or more.

"Well, I'm blessed!" shouted Mr. Tridge, pointing.

"There's the old boat all the time! We've been lying right close to 'er for hours, without knowing it."

They made for the "Jane Gladys." Mr. Pidgett, waking from an uncomfortable doze, wanly eyed the ship.

"I shall be glad to be rid of her," he said.

"I don't know what 'er state's like, sir," said Mr. Tridge eagerly, "but if you want to sell 'er, me and the cook and Sam Clark and Peter Lock will make you a offer for it. We could come to terms, I'm sure, if you'd talk it over, soon as we get aboard, with 'Orace, sir. Hi, 'Orace," he could not forbear from calling across, "the owner's 'ad enough of the old 'Jane Gladys' and 'e wants to sell 'er!"

"I have had enough of her," said Mr. Pidgett. "I don't think I care for the sea. But I don't want to sell the 'Jane Gladys' all the same."

"But, sir——" pleaded Mr. Tridge.

"Why, I couldn't sell her if I wanted to," stated Mr. Pidgett. "Not now I've promised her to my niece and her future husband as a wedding-present. They'll soon be able to afford to keep her. *I'll see to that!*" . . .

At the end of the week, in the snugest corner of the snugest tap-room in Shorehaven, Mr. Samuel Clark and Mr. Peter Lock and Mr. Joseph Tridge sat in pleasant dalliance with their pipes and glasses.

"Ah! 'oo'd 'ave thought, five days ago, that us chaps would be sitting in the 'Jolly Sailors' at Shore'aven on Saturday night!" observed Mr. Clark.

"And the old 'Jane Gladys,' with 'er innards all charred, lying in a yard 'undreds of miles away to be repaired and redecorated?" said Mr. Tridge. "It must 'ave been a pretty big blaze while it lasted. And to

think of young Stanley putting it out single-anded. But didn't 'is pa make a fuss of 'im, eh?"

"They won't fall out for a long time now, them two," prophesied Mr. Clark. "Young Stanley's learned a lot of sense off of us, what'll stand 'im in good stead in future. Oh, 'e'll be all right when 'e grows up. Not a bad kid, I dare say, when the varnish peels off."

"Lucky they never found our little firework display in the 'old," mentioned Mr. Tridge.

"No fear!" said Mr. Lock. "I nipped down and got rid of the evidence, quick, while the owner was still fussing over Stanley. I didn't forget it, you bet!"

"Forgot me and Mrs. Brockway, though, didn't you?" asked Mr. Clark. "We waited and waited, you know, and then I got 'er a room at the 'Red Dragon,' and I come back to the jetty, and went on waiting. I couldn't think what was up, and—— Ah, 'ere's 'Orace at last!"

Something very like a subdued cheer flattered Mr. Dobb as he crossed the room to his three shipmates.

"Funds of the signdikit, 'Orace!" Mr. Clark at once reminded him. "We're all 'ere and waiting."

"The funds is all right," said Mr. Dobb, sitting down. "We've got forty pounds in 'and, apart from the private money we each of us 'eld ready to subscribe. There was twenty pounds to begin with from Smith—I mean Mr. Wayfield—and then another ten from 'im, and five pounds the morning 'e left, and five pounds Mr. Stanley give us when we said good-bye to 'im."

"And then there's the ten pounds each, over and above our wages and expenses, what the owner give us," said Mr. Lock. "Lucky he was far too muddled after his evening with that lobster to remember anything

clearly. We managed him all right. All he could remember was that there was a fire."

"Forty pounds between us, and ten each we've got already—that's twenty pounds in all," calculated Mr. Tridge.

"And that ain't at all a bad profit for a signdikit to earn in its first voyage," commented Mr. Dobb.

"We wasn't able to buy the old boat, though," said Mr. Clark. "Of course," he added dubiously, "we might, some of us, try to get signed on with Mr. Wayfield, and 'ave another try to get 'er later on, but——"

"Or we might take our four twenties, and add our private money to it," said Mr. Lock, but without enthusiasm, "and make a offer for some other boat. We might get 'Orace & Co.,' shipowners, started that way."

"Aye, we *might*," agreed Mr. Dobb, and there ensued a little pause.

"For myself," said Mr. Tridge rather awkwardly, at last, "I'm afraid I'll 'ave to withdraw from the signdikit. I've been 'aving a chat with the chap what bought the Magnolia T'ilet Saloon off of me. 'E's 'ad enough of it, and 'e's ready to sell it back to me for twenty quid and an IOU. In fact, I've settled with 'im already. I'm sorry, but there it is."

"For that matter," stated Mr. Lock, "I'd like to leave the signdikit myself. My old boss, down at the 'Royal William,' has been talking to me. He's missed me. He admits it. And, now he's put a cash-register in the billiard-room, he's quite ready to forget and forgive and take me back. I've got a wife and kiddie in the town here and—well, I've as good as promised I'll go back."

"If Peter and Joe is backing out, I'm backing out

too," said Mr. Clark. "In fact, I shall pretty well 'ave to before long. I've got a little business speckylation on what's going to take up a lot of my time and——"

"Well, well, everything's turning out for the best," cried Mr. Dobb in high humour. "Tell you for why! My missis 'as swung right round since I been away. Missed me? She couldn't 'ave missed me more if I'd been a cross between a millionaire and a angel! And——well, we've talked things over and I'm resigning from the signdikit. After all, we done pretty well, and we've all come back more satisfied than we started."

"'Ear, 'ear!" cordially agreed his friends.

"So the signdikit is 'ereby dissolved," announced Horace. "I've got the money with me to pay you all out now, and that'll be the end of the signdikit."

"*Pro tem*," said Mr. Lock. "And not counting such *sub rosey* things as we may fix up in the town from time to time."

"That's the idea!" cried Mr. Dobb. "'Ere, know that little shop of mine in Fore Street? Me and my missis are going to try it on a different line now. We're going to run it as a restyrong. Old friends always welcome, old helpers always rewarded."

"And—and there'll be another old acquaintance from the 'Jane Gladys' living in Shore'aven," observed Mr. Clark, speaking a little askance. "Remember Mrs. Brockway? Seems she's got a bit of capital, and she's going to buy a bathing-machine pitch on the beach with it. Telling me all about it, she was, that night you chaps made me take 'er for a walk ashore in the mist."

"'Ere, if she's got a bit of capital," interrupted Mr. Tridge, "I reckon it was a unfriendly act of yours not to tell *me*! I might 'ave——"

"Too late, Joe," said Mr. Clark. "Next Monday

morning she's going along to the Registry Office with *me*. I'm marrying 'er myself. We fixed it all up that evening. You gave us time to talk about such a lot of things. We shall be as 'appy as a couple of turtle doves! I always thought so, right from the start."

"Yes, but what about that little business speckylation what's going to take up most of your time?" asked Mr. Dobb.

"That's it," said Mr. Clark simply.

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